



THE MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT.—P. 13.

THE
EXPERIENCES OF A BARRISTER
AND OTHER TALES



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THE MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT.



‘It is really time that a properly-qualified governess had charge of those girls,’ observed my wife, as Mary and Kate, after a more than usually boisterous romp with their papa, left the room for bed. I may here remark, *inter alia*, that I once surprised a dignified and highly-distinguished judge at a game of blindman’s buff with his children, and very heartily he appeared to enjoy it too. ‘It is really time that a properly-qualified governess had charge of those girls. Susan May did very well as a nursery teacher, but they are now far beyond her control. I cannot attend to their education, and as for you’—— The sentence was concluded by a shrug of the shoulders and a toss of the head, eloquently expressive of the degree of estimation in which *my* governing powers were held.

‘Time enough, surely, for that,’ I exclaimed, as soon as I had composed myself; for I was a little out of breath.

‘They may, I think, rub along with Susan for another year or two. Mary is but seven years of age’——

‘Eight years, if you please. She was eight years old last Thursday three weeks.’

‘Eight years! Then we must have been nine married! Bless me, how the time has flown: it seems scarcely so many weeks!’

‘Nonsense,’ rejoined my wife with a sharpness of tone and a rigidity of facial muscle which, considering the handsome compliment I had just paid her, argued, I was afraid, a foregone conclusion. ‘You always have recourse to some folly of that sort whenever I am desirous of entering into a serious consultation on family affairs.’

There was some truth in this, I confess. The ‘consultations’ which I found profitable were not serious ones with my wife upon domestic matters; leading, as they invariably did, to a diminution instead of an increase of the little balance at my banker’s. If such a proposition could therefore be evaded or adjourned by even an extravagant compliment, I considered it well laid out. But the expedient, I found, was one which did not improve by use. For some time after marriage it answered remarkably well; but each succeeding year of wedded bliss marked its rapidly-declining efficacy.

‘Well, well; go on.’

‘I say it is absolutely necessary that a first-rate governess should be at once engaged. Lady Maldon has been here to-day, and she’——

‘Oh, I thought it might be her new ladyship’s suggestion. I wish the “fountain of honour” was somewhat charier of its knights and ladies, and then perhaps’——

‘What, for mercy’s sake, are you running on about?’ interrupted the lady with peremptory emphasis. ‘Fountains of honour, forsooth! One would suppose, to hear you talk

in that wild, nonsensical way, that you were addressing a bench of judges sitting *in banco*, instead of a sensible person solicitous for her and your children's welfare.'

'Bless the woman,' thought I; 'what an exalted idea she appears to have of forensic eloquence!—Proceed, my love,' I continued; 'there is a difference certainly; and I am all attention.'

'Lady Maldon knows a young lady—a distant relative, indeed, of hers—whom she is anxious to serve'——

'At our expense.'

'How can you be so ungenerous? Edith Willoughby is the orphan daughter of the late Reverend Mr Willoughby, curate of Heavy Tree in Warwickshire, I believe; and was specially educated for a first-class governess and teacher. She speaks French with the true Parisian accent, and her Italian, Lady Maldon assures me, is pure Tuscan'——

'He-e-e-m!'

'She dances with grace and elegance; plays the harp and piano with skill and taste; is a thorough *artiste* in drawing and painting; and is moreover, very handsome—though beauty, I admit, is an attribute which in a governess might be very well dispensed with.'

'True; unless, indeed, it were catching.'

I need not prolong this connubial dialogue. It is sufficient to state that Edith Willoughby was duly installed in office on the following day; and that, much to my surprise, I found that her qualifications for the charge she had undertaken were scarcely overcoloured. She was a well-educated, elegant, and beautiful girl, of refined and fascinating manners, and possessed of one of the sweetest, gentlest dispositions that ever charmed and graced the family and social circle. She was, I often thought, for her own chance of happiness too ductile, too readily yielding to the wishes and fancies of others. In a very short time I

came to regard her as a daughter, and with my wife and children she was speedily a prodigious favourite. Mary and Kate improved rapidly under her judicious tuition, and I felt for once positively grateful to busy Lady Maldon for her officious interference in my domestic arrangements.

Edith Willoughby had been domiciled with us about two years, when Mr Harlowe, a gentleman of good descent and fine property, had occasion to call several times at my private residence on business relating to the purchase of a house in South Audley Street, the title to which exhibited by the vendors was not of the most satisfactory kind. On one occasion he stayed to dine with us, and I noticed that he seemed much struck by the appearance of our beautiful and accomplished governess. His evident emotion startled and pained me in a much higher degree than I could have easily accounted for even to myself. Mr Harlowe was a widower, past his first youth certainly, but scarcely more than two or three and thirty years of age, wealthy, not ill-looking, and, as far as I knew, of average character in society. Surely an excellent match, if it should come to that, for an orphan girl rich only in fine talents and gentle affections. But I could not think so. I disliked the man—*instinctively* disliked and distrusted him; for I could assign no very positive motive for my antipathy.

The reason why, I cannot tell,
But I don't like thee, Dr Fell.

These lines indicate an unconquerable feeling which most persons have, I presume, experienced; and which frequently, I think, results from a kind of cumulative evidence of uncongeniality or unworthiness, made up of a number of slight indices of character, which, separately, may appear of little moment, but all together produce a strong if undefinable feeling of aversion. Mr Harlowe's manners were bland, polished, and insinuating; his conversation was sparkling

and instructive ; but a cold sneer seemed to play habitually about his lips, and at times there glanced forth a concentrated polished ferocity—so to speak—from his eyes, revealing hard and stony depths, which I shuddered to think that a being so pure and gentle as Edith might be doomed to sound and fathom. That he was a man of strong passions and determination of will, was testified by every curve of his square massive head, and every line of his full countenance.

My aversion—reasonable or otherwise, as it might be—was not shared by Miss Willoughby ; and it was soon apparent that, fascinated, intoxicated by her extreme beauty (the man was, I felt, incapable of love in its high, generous, and spiritual sense), Mr Harlowe had determined on offering his hand and fortune to the unportioned orphan. He did so, and was accepted. I did not conceal my dislike of her suitor from Edith ; and my wife—who, with feminine exaggeration of the hints I threw out, had set him down as a kind of polished human tiger—with tears entreated her to avoid the glittering snare. We of course had neither right nor power to push our opposition beyond friendly warning and advice ; and when we found—thanks to Lady Maldon, who was vehemently in favour of the match—to, in Edith's position, the dazzling temptation of a splendid establishment, and to Mr Harlowe's eloquent and impassioned pleadings—that the rich man's offer was irrevocably accepted, we of course forebore from continuing a useless and irritating resistance. Lady Maldon had several times very plainly intimated that our aversion to the marriage arose solely from a selfish desire of retaining the services of her charming relative ; so prone are the mean and selfish to impute meanness and selfishness to others.

I might, however, I reflected, be of service to Miss Willoughby, by securing for her such a marriage settle-

ment as would place her beyond the reach of one possible consequence of caprice and change. I spoke to Mr Harlowe on the subject ; and he, under the influence of headstrong, eager passion, gave me, as I expected, *carte blanche*. I availed myself of the license so readily afforded : a deed of settlement was drawn up, signed, sealed, and attested in duplicate the day before the wedding ; and Edith Willoughby, as far as wealth and position in society were concerned, had undoubtedly made a surprising good bargain.

It happened that just as Lady Maldon, Edith Willoughby, and Mr Harlowe were leaving my chambers after the execution of the deed, Mr Ferret the attorney appeared on the stairs. His hands were full of papers, and he was, as usual, in hot haste ; but he stopped abruptly as his eye fell upon the departing visitors, looked with startled earnestness at Miss Willoughby, whom he knew, and then glanced at Mr Harlowe with an expression of angry surprise. That gentleman, who did not appear to recognise the new-comer, returned his look with a supercilious, contemptuous stare, and passed on with Edith—who had courteously saluted the inattentive Mr Ferret—followed by Lady Maldon.

‘What is the meaning of that ominous conjunction?’ demanded Mr Ferret as the affianced pair disappeared together.

‘Marriage, Mr Ferret ! Do you know any just cause or impediment why they should not be joined together in holy wedlock?’

‘The fellow’s wife is dead then?’

‘Yes ; she died about a twelvemonth ago. Did you know her?’

‘Not personally ; by reputation only. A country attorney, Richards of Braintree, for whom I transact London business, sent me the draught of a deed of separation—to which the unfortunate lady, rather than continue to live with her

husband, had consented—for counsel's opinion. I had an interview with Mr Harlowe himself upon the business; but I see he affects to have forgotten me. I do not know much of the merits of the case, but according to Richards—no great shakes of a fellow, between ourselves—the former Mrs Harlowe was a martyr to her husband's calculated virulence and legal—at least not *illegal*, a great distinction, in my opinion, though not so set down in the books—despotism. He espoused her for her wealth: that secured, he was desirous of ridding himself of the incumbrance to it. A common case!—and now, if you please, to business.'

I excused myself, as did my wife, from being present at the wedding; but everything, I afterwards heard, passed off with great *éclat*. The bridegroom was all fervour and obsequiousness; the bride all bashfulness and beauty. The 'happy pair,' I saw by the afternoon newspapers, were to pass the honeymoon at Mr Harlowe's seat, Fairdown Park. The evening of the marriage-day was anything, I remember, but a pleasant one to me. I reached home by no means hilariously disposed, when I was greeted, by way of revival, with the intelligence that my wife, after listening with great energy to Lady Maldon's description of the wedding festivities for two tremendous hours, had at last been relieved by copious hysteria, and that Mary and Kate were in a fair way—if the exploit could be accomplished by perseverance—of crying themselves to sleep. These were our bridal compliments; much more flattering, I imagine, if not quite so honey-accented as the courtly phrases with which the votaries and the victims of Hymen are alike usually greeted.

Time, business, worldly hopes and cares, the triumphs and defeats of an exciting profession, gradually weakened the impression made upon me by the gentle virtues of

Edith Willoughby; and when, about fifteen months after the wedding, my wife informed me that she had been accosted by Mrs Harlowe at a shop in Bond Street, my first feeling was one of surprise, not untinged with resentment, for what I deemed her ungrateful neglect.

‘She recognised you then?’ I remarked.

‘Recognised me! What do you mean?’

‘I thought perhaps she might have forgotten your features, as she evidently has our address.’

‘If you had seen,’ replied my wife, ‘how pale, how cold, how utterly desolate she looked, you would think less hardly of her. As soon as she observed me, a slight scream escaped her; and then she glanced eagerly and tremblingly around like a startled fawn. Her husband had passed out of the shop to give, I think, some direction to the coachman. She tottered towards me, and clasping me in her arms, burst into a passion of tears. “Oh, why—why,” I asked as soon as I could speak, “why have you not written to us?” “I dared not!” she gasped. “But oh tell me, do you—does your husband remember me with kindness? Can I still reckon on his protection—his support?” I assured her you would receive her as your own child: the whispered words had barely passed my lips, when Mr Harlowe, who had swiftly approached us unperceived, said: “Madam, the carriage waits.” His stern, pitiless eye glanced from his wife to me, and stiffly bowing, he said: “Excuse me for interrupting your conversation; but time presses. Good-day.” A minute afterwards, the carriage drove off.’

I was greatly shocked at this confirmation of my worst fears; and I meditated with intense bitterness on the fate of a being of such meek tenderness exposed to the heartless brutalities of a sated sensualist like Harlowe. But what could be done? She had deliberately, and after warning, chosen her lot, and must accept the consequences of her

choice. In all the strong statutes and sharp-biting laws of England there can be found no clause wherewith to shield a woman from the 'regulated' meanness and despotism of an unprincipled husband. Resignation is the sole remedy, and therein the patient must minister to herself.

On the morning of the Sunday following Edith's brief interview with my wife, and just as we were about to leave the house to attend divine service, a cab drove furiously up to the door, and a violent summons by both knocker and bell announced the arrival of some strangely-impatient visitor. I stepped out upon the drawing-room landing, and looked over the banister rail, curious to ascertain who had honoured me with so peremptory a call. The door was quickly opened, and in ran, or rather staggered, Mrs Harlowe, with a child in long-clothes in her arms.

'Shut—shut the door!' she faintly exclaimed, as she sank on one of the hall seats. 'Pray shut the door—I am pursued!'

I hastened down, and was just in time to save her from falling on the floor. She had fainted. I had her carried up-stairs, and by the aid of proper restoratives, she gradually recovered consciousness. The child, a girl about four months old, was seized upon by Mary and Kate, and carried off in triumph to the nursery. Sadly changed, indeed, as by the sickness of the soul, was poor Edith. The radiant flush of youth and hope, rendering her sweet face eloquent of joy and pride, was replaced by the cold, sad hues of wounded affections and proud despair. I could read in her countenance, as in a book, the sad record of long months of wearing sorrow, vain regrets, and bitter self-reproach. Her person, too, had lost its rounded, airy, graceful outline, and had become thin and angular. Her voice, albeit, was musical and gentle as ever, as she murmured, on recovering her senses: 'You will protect me from my—from that man?'

As I warmly pressed her hand, in emphatic assurance that I would shield her against all comers, another loud summons was heard at the door. A minute afterwards, a servant entered, and announced that Mr Harlowe waited for me below. I directed he should be shewn into the library; and after iterating my assurance to Edith that she was quite safe from violence beneath my roof, and that I would presently return to hear her explanation of the affair, I went down-stairs.

Mr Harlowe, as I entered, was pacing rapidly up and down the apartment. He turned to face me; and I thought he looked even more perturbed and anxious than vengeful and angry. He, however, as I coldly bowed and demanded his business with me, instantly assumed a bullying air and tone.

‘Mrs Harlowe is here: she has surreptitiously left South Audley Street in a hired cab, and I have traced her to this house.’

‘Well?’

‘Well! I trust it is well; and I insist that she instantly return to her home.’

‘Her *home*!’

I used the word with an expression significative only of my sense of the sort of ‘home’ he had provided for the gentle girl he had sworn to love and cherish; but the random shaft found a joint in his armour at which it was not aimed. He visibly trembled, and turned pale.

‘She has had time to tell you all then! But be assured, sir, that nothing she has heard or been told, however true it may be—*may* be, remember, I say—can be legally substantiated except by myself.’

What could the man mean? I was fairly puzzled: but, professionally accustomed to conceal emotions of surprise and bewilderment, I coldly replied: ‘I have left the lady

who has sought the protection of her true "home," merely to ascertain the reason of this visit.'

'The reason of my visit!' he exclaimed with renewed fury: 'to reconvey her to South Audley Street. What else? If you refuse to give her up, I shall apply to the police.'

I smiled, and approached the bell.

'You will not surrender her then?'

'To judicial process only: of that be assured. I have little doubt that, when I am placed in full possession of all the facts of the case, I shall be quite able to justify my conduct.' He did not reply, and I continued: 'If you choose to wait here till I have heard Edith's statement, I will at once frankly acquaint you with my final determination.'

'Be it so: and please to recollect, sir, that you have to deal with a man not easily baffled or entrapped by legal subtlety or cunning.'

I reascended to the drawing-room; and finding Edith—thanks to the ministrations, medicinal and oral, of my bustling and indignant lady—much calmer, and thoroughly satisfied that nobody could or should wrest her from us, begged her to relate unreservedly the cause or causes which had led to her present position. She falteringly complied; and I listened with throbbing pulse and burning cheeks to the sad story of her wedded wretchedness, dating from within two or three months of the marriage; and finally consummated by a disclosure that, if provable, might consign Harlowe to the hulks. The tears, the agony, the despair of the unhappy lady, excited in me a savageness of feeling, an eager thirst for vengeance which I had believed foreign to my nature. Edith divined my thoughts, and taking my hand, said: 'Never, sir, never will I appear against him: the father of my little Helen shall never be publicly accused by me.'

'You err, Edith,' I rejoined; 'it is a positive duty to bring so consummate a villain to justice. He has evidently calculated on your gentleness of disposition, and must be disappointed.'

I soon, however, found it was impossible to shake her resolution on this point; and I returned with a heart full of grief and bitterness to Mr Harlowe.

'You will oblige me, sir,' I exclaimed as I entered the room, 'by leaving this house immediately; I would hold no further converse with so vile a person.'

'How! Do you know to whom you presume to speak in this manner?'

'Perfectly. You are one Harlowe, who, after a few months' residence with a beautiful and amiable girl had extinguished the passion which induced him to offer her marriage, showered on her every species of insult and indignity of which a cowardly and malignant nature is capable; and who, finding that did not kill her, at length consummated, or revealed, I do not yet know which term is most applicable, his utter baseness by causing her to be informed that his first wife was still living.'

'Upon my honour, sir, I believed, when I married Miss Willoughby, that I was a widower.'

'Your honour! But except to prove that I *do* thoroughly know and appreciate the person I am addressing, I will not bandy words with you. After that terrible disclosure—if, indeed, it be a disclosure, not an invention—— Ah, you start at that!'

'At your insolence, sir; not at your senseless surmises.'

'Time and the law will shew. After, I repeat, this terrible disclosure or invention, you, not content with obtaining from your victim's generosity a positive promise that she would not send you to the hulks'——

'Sir, have a care.'

‘Pooh! I say, not content with exacting this promise from your victim, you, with your wife, or accomplice, threatened not only to take her child from her, but to lock her up in a madhouse, unless she subscribed a paper, confessing that she knew, when you espoused her, that you were a married man. Now, sir, do I, or do I not, thoroughly know who and what the man is I am addressing?’

‘Sir,’ returned Harlowe, recovering his audacity somewhat, ‘spite of all your hectoring and abuse, I defy you to obtain proof—legal proof—whether what Edith has heard is true or false. The affair may perhaps be arranged: let her return with me.’

‘You know she would die first: but it is quite useless to prolong this conversation; and I again request you to leave this house.’

‘If Miss Willoughby would accept an allowance’——

The cool audacity of this proposal to make me an instrument in compromising a felony exasperated me beyond all bounds. I rang the bell violently, and desired the servant who answered it to shew Mr Harlowe out of the house. Finding further persistence useless, the baffled villain snatched up his hat, and with a look and gesture of rage and contempt hurried out of the apartment.

The profession of a barrister necessarily begets habits of coolness and reflection under the most exciting circumstances; but I confess that in this instance my ordinary equanimity was so much disturbed, that it was some time before I could command sufficient composure to reason calmly upon the strange revelations made to me by Edith, and the nature of the measures necessary to adopt in order to clear up the mystery attaching to them. She persisted in her refusal to have recourse to legal measures with a view to the punishment of Harlowe; and I finally determined—after a conference with Mr Ferret, who, having acted for the

first Mrs Harlowe, I naturally conjectured must know something of her history and connections—to take for the present no ostensible steps in the matter. Mr Ferret, like myself, was persuaded that the sham resuscitation of his first wife was a mere trick, to enable Harlowe to rid himself of the presence of a woman he no longer cared for. ‘I will take an opportunity,’ said Mr Ferret, ‘of quietly questioning Richards: he must have known the first wife; Eleanor Wickham, I remember, was her maiden name; and if not bought over by Harlowe—a by no means improbable supposition—he can set us right at once. I did not understand that the said Eleanor was at all celebrated for beauty and accomplishments, such as you say Miss Willoughby—Mrs Harlowe I mean—describes. She was a native of Dorsetshire too, I remember; and the foreign Italian accent you mention is rarely, I fancy, picked up in that charming county. Some flashy opera-dancer, depend upon it, whom he has contracted a passing fancy for: a slippery gentleman certainly; but, with a little caution, we shall not fail to trip up his heels, clever as he may be.’

A stronger wrestler than either of us was upon the track of the unhappy man. Edith had not been with us above three weeks, when one of Mr Harlowe’s servants called at my chambers to say that his master, in consequence of a wound he had inflicted on his foot with an axe, whilst amusing himself with cutting or pruning some trees in the grounds at Fairdown, was seriously ill, and had expressed a wish to see me. I could not leave town; but as it was important Mr Harlowe should be seen, I requested Mr Ferret to proceed to Fairdown House. He did so, and late in the evening returned with the startling intelligence that Mr Harlowe was dead!

‘Dead!’ I exclaimed, much shocked. ‘Are you serious?’

‘As a judge. He expired about an hour after I reached

the house, of *tetanus*, commonly called locked-jaw. His body, by the contraction of the muscles, was bent like a bow, and rested on his heels and the back part of his head. He was incapable of speech long before I saw him; but there was a world of agonised expression in his eyes!’

‘Dreadful! Your journey was useless then?’

‘Not precisely. I saw the pretended former wife: a splendid woman, and as much Eleanor Wickham of Dorsetshire as I am. They mean, however, to shew fight, I think; for, as I left the place, I observed that delightful knave Richards enter the house. I took the liberty of placing seals upon the desks and cabinets, and directed the butler and other servants to see that nothing was disturbed or removed till Mrs Harlowe’s—the true Mrs Harlowe’s—arrival.’

The funeral was to take place on the following Wednesday; and it was finally arranged that both of us should accompany Edith to Fairdown on the day after it had taken place, and adopt such measures as circumstances might render necessary. Mr Ferret wrote to this effect to all parties concerned.

On arriving at the house, Mrs Harlowe, Ferret, and I proceeded at once to the drawing-room, where we found the pretended wife seated in great state, supported on one side by Mr Richards, and on the other by Mr Quillet the eminent proctor. Edith was dreadfully agitated, and clung frightened and trembling to my arm. I conducted her to a seat, and placed myself beside her, leaving Mr Ferret—whom so tremendous an array of law and learning, evincing a determination to fight the matter out *à l’outrance*, filled with exuberant glee—to open the conference.

‘Good-morning, madam,’ cried he the moment he entered the room, and quite unaffected by the lady’s scornful and haughty stare: ‘good-morning; I am delighted to see you

in such excellent company. You do not, I hope, forget that I once had the honour of transacting business for you ?’

‘You had transactions of my business !’ said the lady. ‘When, I pray you ?’

‘God bless me !’ cried Ferret, addressing Richards, ‘what a charming Italian accent ; and out of Dorsetshire too !’

‘Dorsetshire, sir ?’ exclaimed the lady.

‘Ay, Dorsetshire to be sure. Why, Mr Richards, our respected client appears to have forgotten her place of birth ! How very extraordinary !’

Mr Richards now interfered, to say that Mr Ferret was apparently labouring under a strange misapprehension. ‘This lady,’ continued he, ‘is Madame Giuletta Corelli.’

‘Whe—e—w !’ rejoined Ferret, thrown for an instant off his balance by the suddenness of the confession, and perhaps a little disappointed at so placable a termination of the dispute—‘Giuletta Corelli ! What is the meaning of this array then ?’

‘I am glad, madam,’ said I, interposing for the first time in the conversation, ‘for your own sake, that you have been advised not to persist in the senseless as well as iniquitous scheme devised by the late Mr Harlowe ; but this being the case, I am greatly at a loss to know why either you or these legal gentlemen are here ?’

The brilliant eyes of the Italian flashed with triumphant scorn, and a smile of contemptuous irony curled her beautiful lip as she replied : ‘These legal gentlemen will not have much difficulty in explaining my right to remain in my own house.’

‘Your house ?’

‘Precisely, sir,’ replied Mr Quillet. ‘This mansion, together with all other property, real and personal, of which the deceased Henry Harlowe died possessed, is bequeathed by will—dated about a month since—to this lady, Giuletta Corelli.’

‘A will!’ exclaimed Mr Ferret with an explosive shout ; and turning to me, whilst his sharp gray eyes danced with irrepressible mirth—‘Did I not tell you so?’

‘Your usual sagacity, Mr Ferret, has not in this instance failed you. Perhaps you will permit me to read the will? But before I do so,’ continued Mr Quillet, as he drew his gold-rimmed spectacles from their morocco sheath, ‘you will allow me, if you please, to state that the legatee, delicately appreciating the position of the widow, will allow her any reasonable annuity—say five hundred pounds per annum for life.’

‘Will she really though?’ cried Mr Ferret, boiling over with ecstasy. ‘Madam, let me beg of you to confirm this gracious promise.’

‘Certainly I do.’

‘Capital!—glorious!’ rejoined Ferret ; and I thought he was about to perform a saltatory movement, that must have brought his cranium into damaging contact with the chandelier under which he was standing. ‘Is it not delightful? How every one—especially an attorney—loves a generous giver!’

Mr Richards appeared to be rendered somewhat uneasy by these strange demonstrations. He knew Ferret well, and evidently suspected that something was wrong somewhere. ‘Perhaps, Mr Quillet,’ said he, ‘you had better read the will at once.’

This was done: the instrument devised in legal and minute form all the property, real and personal, to Giulietta Corelli—a natural-born subject of his majesty it appeared, though of foreign parentage, and of partially foreign education.

‘Allow me to say,’ broke in Mr Ferret, interrupting me as I was about to speak—‘allow me to say, Mr Richards, that that will does you credit: it is, I should say, a first-rate

affair, for a country practitioner especially. But of course you submitted the draught to counsel?’

‘Certainly I did,’ said Richards tartly.

‘No doubt—no doubt. Clearness and precision like that could only have proceeded from a master’s hand. I shall take a copy of that will, Richards, for future guidance, you may depend, the instant it is registered in Doctors’ Commons.’

‘Come, come, Mr Ferret,’ said I; ‘this jesting is all very well; but it is quite time the farce should end.’

‘Farce!’ exclaimed Mr Richards.

‘Farce!’ growled doubtful Mr Quillet.

‘Farce!’ murmured the beautiful Giulietta.

‘Farce!’ cried Mr Ferret. ‘My dear sir, it is about one of the most charming and genteel comedies ever enacted on any stage, and the principal part, too, by one of the most charming of prima donnas. Allow me, sir—don’t interrupt me! it is too delicious to be shared; it is indeed. Mr Richards, and you, Mr Quillet, will you permit me to observe that this admirable will has *one* slight defect?’

‘A defect!—where—how?’

‘It is really heart-breaking that so much skill and ingenuity should be thrown away; but the fact is, gentlemen, that the excellent person who signed it had no property to bequeath!’

‘How?’

‘Not a shilling’s worth. Allow me, sir, if you please. This piece of parchment, gentlemen, is, I have the pleasure to inform you, a marriage settlement.’

‘A marriage settlement!’ exclaimed both the men of law in a breath.

‘A marriage settlement, by which, in the event of Mr Harlowe’s decease, his entire property passes to his wife, in trust for the children, if any; and if not, absolutely to herself.’ Ferret threw the deed on the table, and then giving

way to convulsive mirth, threw himself upon the sofa, and fairly shouted with glee.

Mr Quillet seized the document, and, with Richards, eagerly perused it. The proctor then rose, and bowing gravely to his astonished client, said: 'The will, madam, is waste paper. You have been deceived.' He then left the apartment.

The consternation of the lady and her attorney may be conceived. Madam Corelli, giving way to her fiery passions, vented her disappointment in passionate reproaches of the deceased; the only effect of which was to lay bare still more clearly than before her own cupidity and folly, and to increase Edith's painful agitation. I led her downstairs to my wife, who, I omitted to mention had accompanied us from town, and remained in the library with the children during the conference. In a very short time afterwards Mr Ferret had cleared the house of its intrusive guests, and we had leisure to offer our condolences and congratulations to our grateful and interesting client. It was long before Edith recovered her former gaiety and health; and I doubt if she would ever have thoroughly regained her old cheerfulness and elasticity of mind, had it not been for her labour of love in superintending and directing the education of her daughter Helen, a charming girl, who fortunately inherited nothing from her father but his wealth. The last time I remember to have danced was at Helen's wedding. She married a distinguished Irish gentleman, with whom and her mother, I perceive by the newspapers, she appeared at Queen Victoria's court in Dublin—one, I am sure, of the brightest stars which glittered in that galaxy of beauty and fashion.



THE SECOND MARRIAGE.



BUSY day in the assize court at Chester, chequered, as usual, by alternate victory and defeat, had just terminated, and I was walking briskly forth, when an attorney of rather low caste in his profession—being principally employed as an intermediary between needy felons and the counsel practising in the Crown Court—accosted me, and presented a brief; at the same time tendering the fee of two guineas marked upon it.

‘I am engaged to-morrow, Mr Barnes,’ I exclaimed a little testily, ‘on the civil side: besides, you know I very seldom take briefs in the Crown Court, even if proffered in due time; and to-morrow will be the last day of the assize in Chester! There are plenty of unemployed counsel who will be glad of your brief.’

‘It is a brief in an action of ejectment,’ replied the attorney—‘*Woodley versus Thorndyke*; and is brought to

recover possession of a freehold estate now held and farmed by the defendant.'

'An action of ejectment to recover possession of a freehold estate! defended, too, I know, by a powerful bar; for I was offered a brief, but declined it. Mr Page leads; and you bring me this for the plaintiff, and at the last moment too! You must be crazed.'

'I told the plaintiff and her grandfather,' rejoined Mr Barnes, 'that it was too late to bespeak counsel's attention to the case; and that the fee, all they have, with much difficulty, been able to raise, was ridiculously small; but they insisted on my applying to you—— Oh, here they are!'

\ We had by this time reached the street, and the attorney pointed towards two figures standing in attitudes of anxious suspense near the gateway. It was dusk, but there was quite sufficient light to distinguish the pale and interesting features of a young female, dressed in faded and scanty mourning, and accompanied by a respectable-looking old man with white hair, and a countenance deeply furrowed by age and grief.

'I told you, Miss Woodley,' said the attorney, 'that this gentleman would decline the brief, especially with such a fee'——

\ 'It is not the fee, man!' I observed, for I was somewhat moved by the appealing dejection exhibited by the white-haired man and his timid grand-daughter; 'but what chance can I have of establishing this person's right—if right she have—to the estate she claims, thus suddenly called upon to act without previous consultation; and utterly ignorant, except as far as this I perceive hastily scrawled brief will instruct me, both of the nature of the plaintiff's claim and of the defence intended to be set up against it?'

‘If you would undertake it, sir,’ said the young woman with a tremulous, hesitating voice, and glistening eyes, ‘for *his* sake’—and she glanced at her aged companion—‘who will else be helpless, homeless.’

‘The blessing of those who are ready to perish will be yours, sir,’ said the grandfather with meek solemnity, ‘if you will lend your aid in this work of justice and mercy. We have no hope of withstanding the masterful violence and wrong of wicked and powerful men, except by the aid of the law, which we have been taught will ever prove a strong tower of defence to those who walk in the paths of peace and right.’

The earnestness of the old man’s language and manner, and the pleading gentleness of the young woman, forcibly impressed me; and, albeit it was a somewhat unprofessional mode of business, I determined to hear their story from their own lips, rather than take it from the scrawled brief, or through the verbal medium of their attorney.

‘You have been truly taught,’ I answered; ‘and if really entitled to the property you claim, I know of no masterful men that in this land of England can hinder you from obtaining possession of it. Come to my hotel in about an hour and a half from hence: I shall then have leisure to hear what you have to say. This fee,’ I added, taking the two guineas from the hand of the attorney, who still held the money ready for my acceptance, ‘you must permit me to return. It is too much for you to pay for losing your cause; and if I gain it—but mind I do not promise to take it into court unless I am thoroughly satisfied you have right and equity on your side—I shall expect a much heavier one. Mr Barnes, I will see you, if you please, early in the morning.’ I then bowed, and hastened on.

—Dinner was not ready when I arrived at the hotel; and during the short time I had to wait, I more than half

repented of having had anything to do with this unfortunate suit. However, the pleadings of charity, the suggestions of human kindness, reasserted their influence; and by the time my new clients arrived, which they did very punctually at the hour I had indicated, I had quite regained the equanimity I had momentarily lost, and, thanks to mine host's excellent viands and generous wine, was, for a lawyer, in a very amiable and benevolent humour indeed.

Our conference was long, anxious, and unsatisfactory. I was obliged to send for Barnes before it concluded, in order to thoroughly ascertain the precise nature of the case intended to be set up for the defendant, and the evidence likely to be adduced in support of it. No ray of consolation or of hope came from that quarter. Still, the narrative I had just listened to, bearing as it did the impress of truth and sincerity in every sentence, strongly disposed me to believe that foul play had been practised by the other side; and I determined at all hazards to go into court, though with but faint hope indeed of a *present* successful issue.

'It appears more than probable,' I remarked on dismissing my clients, 'that this will be a fabrication; but before such a question had been put in issue before a jury, some producible evidence of its being so should have been sought for and obtained. As it is, I can only watch the defendant's proof of the genuineness of the instrument upon which he has obtained probate: one or more of the attesting witnesses *may*, if fraud has been practised, break down under a searching cross-examination, or incidentally perhaps disclose matter for further investigation.'

'One of the attesting witnesses is, as I have already told you, dead,' observed Barnes; 'and another, Elizabeth Wareing, has, I hear, to-day left the country. An affidavit to that effect will no doubt be made to-morrow,

in order to enable them to give secondary evidence of her attestation, though, swear as they may, I have not the slightest doubt *I* could find her if time were allowed, and her presence would at all avail us.'

'Indeed! This is very important. Would you, Mr Barnes, have any objection,' I added, after a few moments' reflection, 'to make oath, should the turn of affairs to-morrow render your doing so desirable, of your belief that you could, reasonable time being allowed, procure the attendance of this woman Elizabeth Wareing?'

'Not the slightest: though how that would help us to invalidate the will Thorndyke claims under I do not understand.'

'Perhaps not. At all events do not fail to be early in court. The cause is the first in to-morrow's list, remember.'

'The story confided to me was a very sad, and unfortunately, in many of its features, a very common one. Ellen, the only child of the old gentleman, Thomas Ward, had early in life married Mr James Woodley, a wealthy yeoman, prosperously settled upon his paternal acres, which he cultivated with great diligence and success. The issue of this marriage—a very happy one, I was informed—was Mary Woodley, the plaintiff in the present action. Mr Woodley, who had now been dead something more than two years, bequeathed the whole of his property, real and personal, to his wife, in full confidence, as he expressed himself but a few hours before he expired, that she would amply provide for his and her child. The value of the property inherited by Mrs Woodley under this will amounted, according to a valuation made a few weeks after the testator's decease, to between eight and nine thousand pounds.

Respected as a widow, comfortable in circumstances,

and with a daughter to engage her affections, Mrs Woodley might have passed the remainder of her existence in happiness. But how frequently do women peril and lose all by a second marriage! Such was the case with Mrs Woodley: to the astonishment of everybody, she threw herself away on a man almost unknown in the district—a person of no fortune, of mean habits, and altogether unworthy of her as a husband. Silas Thorndyke, to whom she thus committed her happiness, had for a short time acted as bailiff on the farm; and no sooner did he feel himself master, than his subserviency was changed to selfish indifference, and that gradually assumed a coarser character. He discovered that the property, by the will of Mr Woodley, was so secured against every chance or casualty to the use and enjoyment of his wife, that it not only did not pass by marriage to the new bridegroom, but she was unable to alienate or divest herself of any portion of it during life. She could, however, dispose of it by will; but in the event of her dying intestate, the whole descended to her daughter, Mary Woodley.

Incidentally savage was Thorndyke when he made that discovery; and bitter and incessant were the indignities to which he subjected his unfortunate wife, for the avowed purpose of forcing her to make a will entirely in his favour, and of course disinheriting her daughter. These persecutions failed of their object. An unexpected, quiet, passive, but unconquerable resistance was opposed by the, in all other things, cowed and submissive woman to this demand of her domineering husband. Her failing health—for, gently nurtured and tenderly cherished as she had ever been, the callous brutality of her husband soon told upon the unhappy creature—warned her that Mary would soon be an orphan, and that upon her firmness it depended whether the child of him to whose memory she had been, so fatally

for herself, unfaithful, should be cast homeless and penniless upon the world, or inherit the wealth to which, by every principle of right and equity, she was entitled. Come what may, this trust at least should not, she mentally resolved, be betrayed or paltered with. Every imaginable expedient to vanquish her resolution was resorted to. Thorndyke picked a quarrel with Ward her father, who had lived at Dale Farm since the morrow of her marriage with Woodley, and the old gentleman was compelled to leave, and take up his abode with a distant and somewhat needy relative. Next Edward Wilford, the only son of a neighbouring and prosperous farmer, who had been betrothed to Mary Woodley several months before her father's death, was brutally insulted, and forbidden the house. All, however, failed to shake the mother's resolution; and at length, finding all his efforts fruitless, Thorndyke appeared to yield the point, and upon this subject at least ceased to harass his unfortunate victim.

Frequent private conferences were now held between Thorndyke, his two daughters, and Elizabeth Wareing—a woman approaching middle-age, whom, under the specious pretence that Mrs Thorndyke's increasing ailments rendered the services of an experienced matron indispensable, he had lately installed at the farm. It was quite evident to both the mother and daughter that a much greater degree of intimacy subsisted between the master and housekeeper than their relative positions warranted; and from some expressions heedlessly dropped by the woman, they suspected them to have been once on terms of confidential intimacy. Thorndyke, I should have mentioned, was not a native of these parts: he had answered Mr Woodley's advertisement for a bailiff, and his testimonials appearing satisfactory, he had been somewhat precipitately engaged. A young man, calling himself Edward Wareing, the son

of Elizabeth Wareing, and said to be engaged in an attorney's office in Liverpool, was also a not unfrequent visitor at Dale Farm; and once he had the insolent presumption to address a note to Mary Woodley, formally tendering his hand and fortune! This, however, did not suit Mr Thorndyke's views, and Mr Edward Wareing was very effectually rebuked and silenced by his proposed father-in-law.

Mrs Thorndyke's health rapidly declined. The woman Wareing, touched possibly by sympathy or remorse, exhibited considerable tenderness and compassion towards the invalid; made her nourishing drinks, and administered the medicine prescribed by the village practitioner—who, after much delay and pooh, poohing by Thorndyke, had been called in—with her own hands. About three weeks previous to Mrs Thorndyke's death, a sort of reconciliation was patched up through her instrumentality between the husband and wife; and an unwonted expression of kindness and compassion, real or simulated, sat upon Thorndyke's features every time he approached the dying woman.

The sands of life ebbed swiftly with Mrs. Thorndyke. Enfolded in the gentle but deadly embrace with which consumption seizes its victims, she wasted rapidly away; and, most perplexing symptom of all, violent retchings and nausea, especially after taking her medicine—which, according to Davis, the village surgeon, was invariably of a sedative character—aggravated and confirmed the fatal disease which was hurrying her to the tomb.

Not once during this last illness could Mary Woodley by chance or stratagem obtain a moment's private interview with her mother until a few minutes before her decease. Until then, under one pretence or another, either Elizabeth Wareing, or one of Thorndyke's daughters, or Thorndyke

himself, was always present in the sick-chamber. It was evening : darkness had for some time fallen : no light had yet been taken into the dying woman's apartment ; and the pale starlight which faintly illumined the room, served—as Mary Woodley softly approached on tiptoe to the bed-side of her, as she supposed, sleeping parent—but to deepen by defining the shadows thrown by the full, heavy hangings, and the old massive furniture. Gently, and with a beating heart, Mary Woodley drew back the bed-curtain nearest the window. The feeble, uncertain light flickered upon the countenance, distinct in its mortal paleness, of her parent : the eyes recognised her, and a glance of infinite tenderness gleamed for an instant in the rapidly darkening orbs : the right arm essayed to lift itself, as for one fast, last embrace. Vainly ! Love, love only, was strong, stronger than death, in the expiring mother's heart, and the arm fell feebly back on the bed-clothes. Mary Woodley bent down in eager grief, for she felt instinctively that the bitter hour at last was come : their lips met, and the last accents of the mother murmured : 'Beloved Mary, I—I have been true to you—no will—no'—— A slight tremor shook her frame : the spirit that looked in love from the windows of the eyes departed on its heavenward journey, and the unconscious shell only of what had once been her mother remained in the sobbing daughter's arms.

~ I will not deny that this narrative, which I feel I have but coldly and feebly rendered, from its earnest, tearful tenderness, as related by Mary Woodley, affected me considerably—*case-hardened* as, to use an old bar-pun, we barristers are supposed to be : nor will the reader be surprised to hear that suspicions, graver even than those which pointed to forgery, were evoked by the sad history. Much musing upon the strange circumstances thus disclosed, and

profoundly cogitative on the best mode of action to be pursued, the 'small hours,' the first of them at least, surprised me in my arm-chair. I started up, and hastened to bed, well knowing from experience that a sleepless vigil is a wretched preparative for a morrow of active exertion, whether of mind or body. I was betimes in court the next morning, and Mr Barnes, proud as a peacock of figuring as an attorney in an important civil suit, was soon at my side. The case had excited more interest than I had supposed, and the court was very early filled. Mary Woodley and her grandfather soon arrived; and a murmur of commiseration ran through the auditory as they took their seats by the side of Barnes. There was a strong bar arrayed against us; and Mr Silas Thorndyke, I noticed, was extremely busy and important with whisperings and suggestions to his solicitor and counsel—received, of course, as such meaningless familiarities usually are, with barely civil indifference.

Twelve common jurors were called and sworn well and truly to try the issue, and I arose amidst breathless silence to address them. I at once frankly stated the circumstances under which the brief had come into my hands, and observed, that if, for lack of advised preparation, the plaintiff's case failed on that day, another trial, under favour of the court above, would, I doubted not, at no distant period of time reverse the possibly, at present, unfavourable decision. 'My learned friends on the other side,' I continued, 'smile at this qualified admission of mine: let them do so. If they apparently establish to-day the validity of a will which strips an only child of the inheritance bequeathed by her father, they will, I tell them emphatically, have obtained but a temporary triumph for a person who—if I, if you, gentlemen of the jury, are to believe the case intended to be set up as a bar to the

plaintiff's claim—has succeeded by the grossest brutality, the most atrocious devices, in bending the mind of the deceased Mrs Thorndyke to his selfish purposes. My learned friend need not interrupt me; I shall pursue these observations no further for the present—merely adding that I, that his lordship, that you, gentlemen of the jury, will require of him the strictest proof—proof clear as light—that the instrument upon which he relies to defeat the equitable, the righteous claim of the young and amiable person by my side, is genuine, and not as I verily believe'—I looked, as I spoke, full in the face of Thorndyke—'FORGED.'

'My lord,' exclaimed the opposing counsel, 'this is really insufferable!'

His lordship, however, did not interpose; and I went on to relate, in the most telling manner of which I was capable, the history of the deceased Mrs Thorndyke's first and second marriages; the harmony and happiness of the first—the wretchedness and cruelty which characterised the second. I narrated also the dying words of Mrs Thorndyke to her daughter, though repeatedly interrupted by the defendant's counsel, who manifested great indignation that a statement unsusceptible of legal proof should be addressed to the court and jury. My address concluded, I put in James Woodley's will; and as the opposing counsel did not dispute its validity, nor require proof of Mary Woodley's identity, I intimated that the plaintiff's case was closed.

The speech for the defendant was calm and guarded. It threw, or rather attempted to throw, discredit on the deathbed 'fiction,' got up, Mr Page said, simply with a view to effect; and he concluded by averring that he should be able to establish the genuineness of the will of Ellen Thorndyke, now produced, by irresistible evidence.

That done, however much the jury might wish the property had been otherwise disposed of, they would of course return a verdict in accordance with their oaths and the law of the land.

The first witness called was Thomas Headley, a smith, residing near Dale Farm. He swore positively that the late Mrs Thorndyke, whom he knew well, had cheerfully signed the will now produced, after it had been deliberately read over to her by her husband, about a fortnight before her death. Silas Thorndyke, John Cummins, Elizabeth Wareing, and witness, were the only persons present. Mrs Thorndyke expressed confidence that her husband would provide for Mary Woodley.

‘And so I will,’ said sleek Silas, rising up, and looking round upon the auditory. ‘If she will return, I will be a father to her.’

No look, no sound of sympathy or approval, greeted this generous declaration, and he sat down again not a little disconcerted.

I asked this burly, half-drunken witness but one question—‘When is your marriage with Rebecca Thorndyke, the defendant’s eldest daughter, to be celebrated?’

‘I don’t know, Mr Lawyer; perhaps never.’

‘That will do; you can go down.’

Mr Page now rose to state that his client was unable to produce Elizabeth Wareing, another of the attesting witnesses to the will, in court. No suspicion had been entertained that any opposition to the solemn testament made by the deceased Mrs Thorndyke would be attempted; and the woman, unaware that her testimony would be required, had left that part of the country. Every effort had been made by the defendant to discover her abode without effect. It was believed she had gone to America, where she had relatives. The defendant had filed an

affidavit setting forth these facts, and it was now prayed that secondary evidence to establish the genuineness of Elizabeth Wareing's attesting signature should be admitted.

I of course vehemently opposed this demand, and broadly hinted that the witness was purposely kept out of the way.

'Will my learned friend,' said Mr Page with one of his sliest sneers, 'inform us what motive the defendant could possibly have to keep back a witness so necessary to him?'

'Elizabeth Wareing,' I curtly replied, 'may not, upon reflection, be deemed a safe witness to subject to the ordeal of a cross-examination. But to settle the matter, my lord,' I exclaimed, 'I have here an affidavit of the plaintiff's attorney, in which he states that he has no doubt of being able to find this important witness if time be allowed him for the purpose; the defendant of course undertaking to call her when produced.'

A tremendous clamour of counsel hereupon ensued, and fierce and angry grew the war of words. The hubbub was at last terminated by the judge recommending that, under the circumstances, 'a juror should be withdrawn.' This suggestion, after some demur, was agreed to. One of the jurors was whispered to come out of the box; then the clerk of the court exclaimed: 'My lord, there are only eleven men on the jury;' and by the aid of this venerable, if clumsy expedient, the cause of Woodley *versus* Thorn-dyke was *de facto* adjourned to a future day.

I had not long returned to the hotel, when I was waited upon by Mr Wilford, senior, the father of the young man who had been forbidden to visit Dale Farm by Thorndyke. His son, he informed me, was ill from chagrin and anxiety—confined to his bed indeed; and Mary Woodley had refused, it seemed, to accept pecuniary aid from either the father or the son. Would I endeavour to terminate the

estrangement which had for some time unhappily existed, and persuade her to accept his, Wilford senior's, freely-offered purse and services? I instantly accepted both the mission and the large sum which the excellent man tendered. A part of the money I gave Barnes to stimulate his exertions, and the rest I placed in the hand of Mary Woodley's grandfather, with a friendly admonition to him not to allow his grand-daughter to make a fool of herself; an exhortation which produced its effect in due season.

Summer passed away, autumn had come and gone, and the winter assizes were once more upon us. Regular proceedings had been taken, and the action in ejectment of Woodley *versus* Thorndyke was once more on the cause list of the Chester circuit court, marked this time as a special jury case. Indefatigable as Mr Barnes had been in his search for Elizabeth Wareing, not the slightest trace of her could he discover; and I went into court, therefore, with but slight expectation of invalidating the, as I fully believed, fictitious will. We had, however, obtained a good deal of information relative to the former history not only of the absent Mrs Wareing, but of Thorndyke himself; and it was quite within the range of probabilities that something might come out, enabling me to use that knowledge to good purpose. The plaintiff and old Mr Ward were seated in court beside Mr Barnes, as on the former abortive trial; but Mary Woodley had, fortunately for herself, lost much of the interest which attaches to female comeliness and grace when associated in the mind of the spectator with undeserved calamity and sorrow. The black dress which she still wore—the orthodox twelve months of mourning for a parent had not yet quite elapsed—was now fresh, and of fine quality, and the pale lilies of her face were interspersed with delicate roses; whilst by her side sat Mr John Wilford, as happy-looking as if no such

things as perjurers, forgers, or adverse verdicts existed to disturb the peace of the glad world. Altogether, we were decidedly less interesting than on the former occasion. Edward Wareing, I must not omit to add, was, greatly to our surprise, present. He sat, in great apparent amity, by the side of Thorndyke.

It was late in the afternoon, and twilight was gradually stealing over the dingy court, when the case was called. The special jury answered to their names, were duly sworn, and then nearly the same preliminary speeches and admissions were made and put in as on the previous occasion. Thomas Headley, the first witness called in support of the pretended will, underwent a rigorous cross-examination; but I was unable to extract anything of importance from him.

‘And now,’ said the defendant’s leading counsel, ‘let me ask my learned friend if he has succeeded in obtaining the attendance of Elizabeth Wareing?’

I was of course obliged to confess that we had been unable to find her; and the judge remarked that in that case he could receive secondary evidence in proof of her attestation of the will.

A whispered but manifestly eager conference here took place between the defendant and his counsel, occasionally joined in by Edward Wareing. There appeared to be indecision or hesitation in their deliberations; but at last Mr Page rose, and with some ostentation of manner addressed the court.

‘In the discharge of my duty to the defendant in this action, my lord, upon whose fair fame much undeserved obloquy has been cast by the speeches of the plaintiff’s counsel—speeches unsupported by a shadow of evidence—I have to state that, anxious above all things to stand perfectly justified before his neighbours and society, he has,

at great trouble and expense, obtained the presence here to-day of the witness Elizabeth Wareing. She had gone to reside in France with a respectable English family in the situation of housekeeper. We shall now place her in the witness-box, and having done so, I trust we shall hear no more of the slanderous imputations so freely lavished upon my client. Call Elizabeth Wareing into court.'

A movement of surprise and curiosity agitated the entire auditory at this announcement. Mr Silas Thorndyke's naturally cadaverous countenance assumed an ashy hue, spite of his efforts to appear easy and jubilant; and for the first time since the commencement of the proceedings I entertained the hope of a successful issue.

Mrs. Wareing appeared in answer to the call, and was duly sworn 'to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' She was a good-looking woman, of perhaps forty years of age, and bore a striking resemblance to her son. She rapidly, smoothly, and unhesitatingly confirmed the evidence of Headley to a tittle. She trembled, I observed, excessively; and on the examining counsel intimating that he had no more questions to ask, turned hastily to leave the box.

'Stay—stay, my good woman,' I exclaimed; 'you and I must have some talk together before we part.'

She started, and looked at me with frightened earnestness; and then her nervous glances stole towards Mr Silas Thorndyke. There was no comfort there; in his countenance she only saw the reflex of the agitation and anxiety which marked her own. Sleek Silas, I could see, already repented of the rash move he had made, and would have given a good deal to get his witness safely and quietly out of court.

It was now nearly dark, and observing that it was necessary the court and jury should see as well as hear the

witness whilst under examination, I requested that lights should be brought in. This was done. Two candles were placed in front of the witness-box, one on each side of Mrs Wareing ; a few others were disposed about the bench and jury desks. The effect of this partial lighting of the gloomy old court was, that the witness stood out in strong and bright relief from the surrounding shadows, rendering the minutest change or play of her features distinctly visible. Mr Silas Thorndyke was, from his position, thrown entirely into the shade, and any telegraphing between him and the witness was thus rendered impossible. This preparation, as if for some extraordinary and solemn purpose, together with the profound silence which reigned in the court, told fearfully, as I expected, upon the nerves of Mrs Elizabeth Wareing. She already seemed as if about to swoon with agitation and ill-defined alarm.

‘Pray, madam,’ said I, ‘is your name Wareing or Tucker?’

She did not answer, and I repeated the question. ‘Tucker,’ she at last replied in a tremulous whisper.

‘I thought so. And pray, Mrs Tucker, were you ever “in trouble” in London for robbing your lodgings?’

I thought she attempted to answer, but no sound passed her lips. One of the ushers of the court handed her a glass of water at my suggestion, and she seemed to recover somewhat. I pressed my question ; and at last she replied in the same low, agitated voice : ‘Yes, I have been.’

‘I know you have. Mr Silas Thorndyke, I believe, was your bail on that occasion, and the matter was, I understand, compromised—arranged—at all events the prosecution was not pressed. Is not that so?’

‘Yes—no—yes.’

‘Very well : either answer will do. You lived also, I believe, with Mr Thorndyke, as his housekeeper of course,

when he was in business as a concocter and vender of infallible drugs and pills ?’

‘Yes.’

‘He was held to be skilful in the preparation of drugs, was he not—well versed in their properties ?’

‘Yes—I believe so—I do not know. Why am I asked such questions ?’

‘You will know presently. And now, woman, answer the question I am about to put to you, as you will be compelled to answer it to God at the last great day—What ~~was~~ the nature of the drug which you or he mixed with the medicine prescribed for the late Mrs Thorndyke ?’

A spasmodic shriek, checked by a desperate effort, partially escaped her, and she stood fixedly gazing with starting eyes in my face.

The profoundest silence reigned in the court as I iterated the question.

‘You must answer, woman,’ said the judge sternly, ‘unless you know your answer will criminate yourself.’

The witness looked wildly round the court, as if in search of counsel or sympathy ; but encountering none but frowning and eager faces—Thorndyke she could not discern in the darkness—she became giddy and panic-stricken, and seemed to lose all presence of mind.

‘He—he—he,’ she at last gasped—‘he mixed it. I do not know—— But how,’ she added, pushing back her hair, and pressing her hands against her hot temples, ‘can this be ? What can it mean ?’

A movement amongst the by-standers just at this moment attracted the notice of the judge, and he immediately exclaimed : ‘The defendant must not leave the court !’ An officer placed himself beside the wretched murderer as well as forger, and I resumed the cross-examination of the witness.

‘Now, Mrs Tucker, please to look at this letter.’ (It was that which had been addressed to Mary Woodley by her son.) ‘That, I believe, is your son’s handwriting?’

‘Yes.’

‘The body of this will has been written by the same hand. Now, woman, answer. Was it your son—this young man who, you perceive, if guilty, cannot escape from justice—was it he who forged the names of the deceased Mrs Thorndyke, and of John Cummins, attached to it?’

‘Not he—not he!’ shrieked the wretched woman. ‘It was Thorndyke—Thorndyke himself.’ And then with a sudden revulsion of feeling, as the consequences of what she had uttered flashed upon her, she exclaimed: ‘O Silas, what have I said?—what have I done?’

‘Hanged me, that’s all, you accursed devil!’ replied Thorndyke with gloomy ferocity. ‘But I deserve it for trusting in such an idiot: dolt and fool that I was for doing so!’

The woman sank down in strong convulsions, and was, by direction of the judge, carried out of the hall.

The anxious silence which pervaded the court during this scene, in which the reader will have observed I played a bold, tentative, and happily successful game, was broken, as the witness was borne off, by a loud murmur of indignation, followed by congratulatory exclamations on the fortunate termination of the suit. The defendant’s counsel threw up their briefs, and a verdict was at once returned for the plaintiff.


All the inculpatated parties were speedily in custody; and the body of Mrs Thorndyke having been disinterred, it was discovered that she had been destroyed by bichloride of mercury, of which a considerable quantity was detected in the body. I was not present at the trial of Thorndyke and

his accomplices—he for murder, and Headley for perjury—but I saw by the public prints that he was found guilty, and executed: Headley was transported: the woman was, if I remember rightly, admitted evidence for the crown.

Mary Woodley was of course put into immediate possession of her paternal inheritance; and was, when I last dined with her and her husband at Dale Farm—a comely, prosperous matron; and as happy as a woman with a numerous progeny and an easy-tempered partner can in this vale of grief and tears expect to be. The service I was fortunately enabled to render her forms one of the most pleasing recollections of my life.



THE REFUGEE.

HE events which I am about to relate occurred towards the close of the last century, some time before I was called to the bar, and do not, therefore, in strictness fall within my own experiences as a barrister. Still, as they came to my knowledge with much greater completeness than if I had been only professionally engaged to assist in the catastrophe of the drama through which they are evolved, and, as I conceive, throw a strong light upon the practical working of our criminal jurisprudence, a brief space may not inappropriately be devoted to record them.

About the time I have indicated, a Mrs Rushton, the widow of an opulent commercial gentleman, resided in Upper Harley Street, Cavendish Square. She was a woman of 'family,' and by her marriage had greatly lowered herself, in her relatives' opinion, by a union with a person who, however wealthy and otherwise honourable, was so entirely

the architect of his own fortunes—owed all that he possessed so immediately to his own skill, sagacity, and perseverance—that there was an unpleasant rumour abroad about his widowed mother being indebted to her son's success in business for having passed the last ten years of her life in ease and competence. Mr Rushton had left his widow a handsome annuity, and to his and her only son a well-invested income of upwards of seven thousand a year. Since the death of her husband, Mrs Rushton, who inherited quite her full share of family pride, if nothing else, had sought by every method she could devise to re-enter the charmed circle from which her union with a city merchant had excluded her. The most effectual mode of accomplishing her purpose was, she knew, to bring about a marriage between her son and a lady who would not be indisposed to accept of wealth and a well-appointed establishment in Mayfair as a set-off against birth and high connection.

Arthur Rushton, at this time between two and three and twenty years of age, was a mild, retiring, rather shy person, and endowed with a tenderness of disposition, of which the tranquil depths had not as yet been ruffled by the faintest breath of passion. His mother possessed almost unbounded influence over him; and he ever listened with a smile, a languid, half-disdainful one, to her eager speculations upon the numerous eligible matches that would present themselves the instant the 'season' and their new establishment in Mayfair—of which the decoration and furnishing engaged all her available time and attention—enabled them to open the campaign with effect. Arthur Rushton and I had been college companions, and our friendly intimacy continued for several years afterwards. At this period especially we were very cordial and unreserved in our intercourse with each other.

London at this time was crowded with French exiles,

escaped from the devouring sword of Robespierre and his helpers in the work of government by the guillotine, almost all of whom claimed to be members of, or closely connected with, the ancient nobility of France. Among these was an elderly gentleman of the name of De Tourville, who, with his daughter Eugénie, had for a considerable time occupied a first floor in King Street, Holborn. Him I never saw in life, but Mademoiselle de Tourville was one of the most accomplished, graceful, enchantingly interesting persons I have ever seen or known. There was a dangerous fascination in the pensive tenderness through which her natural gaiety and archness of manner would at intervals flash, like April sunlight glancing through clouds and showers, which, the first time I saw her, painfully impressed as much as it charmed me—perceiving, as I quickly did, that with her the future peace, I could almost have said life, of Arthur Rushton was irrevocably bound up. The fountains of his heart were for the first time stirred to their inmost depths, and, situated as he and she were, what but disappointment, bitterness, and anguish could well-up from those troubled waters? Mademoiselle de Tourville, I could perceive, was fully aware of the impression she had made upon the sensitive and amiable Englishman; and I sometimes discovered an expression of pity—of sorrowful tenderness, as it were—pass over her features as some distincter revelation than usual of the nature of Arthur Rushton's emotions flashed upon her. I also heard her express herself several times, as overtly as she could, upon the *impossibility* there existed that she should, however much she might desire it, settle in England, or even remain in it for any considerable length of time. All this I understood, or thought I did, perfectly; but Rushton, bewildered, entranced by feelings altogether new to him, saw nothing, heard nothing but her presence, and felt, without reasoning upon it, that in that delirious

dream it was his fate either to live or else to bear no life. Mrs Rushton—and this greatly surprised me—absorbed in her matrimonial and furnishing schemes and projects, saw nothing of what was going on. Probably the notion that her son should for an instant think of allying himself with an obscure, portionless foreigner, was, to a mind like hers, too absurd to be for a moment entertained; or—— But stay: borne along by a crowd of rushing thoughts, I have, I find, somewhat anticipated the regular march of my narrative.

M. and Mademoiselle de Tourville, according to the after-testimony of their landlord, Mr Osborn, had, from the time of their arrival in England, a very constant visitor at their lodgings in King Street. He was a tall French gentleman, of perhaps thirty years of age, and distinguished appearance. His name was La Houssaye. He was very frequently with them indeed, and generally he and M. de Tourville would go out together in the evening, the latter gentleman not returning home till very late. This was more especially the case after Mademoiselle de Tourville ceased to reside with her father.

Among the fashionable articles with which Mrs Rushton was anxious to surround herself, was a companion of accomplishments and high-breeding, who might help her to rub off the rust she feared to have contracted by her connection with the city. A Parisian lady of high lineage and perfect breeding might, she thought, be easily obtained; and an advertisement brought Mademoiselle de Tourville to her house. Mrs Rushton was delighted with the air and manners of the charming applicant; and after a slight inquiry by letter to an address of reference given by the young lady, immediately engaged her, on exceedingly liberal terms, for six months—that being the longest period for which Mademoiselle de Tourville could undertake to remain.

She also stipulated for permission to pass the greater part of one day in the week—that which might happen to be most convenient to Mrs Rushton—with her father. One other condition testified alike to M. de Tourville's present poverty and her own filial piety: it was, that her salary should be paid weekly—she would not accept it in advance—avowedly for the necessities of her parent, who, poor exile! and tears stood in Eugénie's dark lustrous eyes as she spoke, was ever trembling on the brink of the grave from an affection of the heart with which he had been long afflicted. Mademoiselle de Tourville, I should state, spoke English exceedingly well as far as the rules of syntax and the meanings of words went, and with an accent charming in its very defectiveness.

She had resided with Mrs Rushton, who on all occasions treated her with the greatest kindness and consideration, for rather more than two months, when an incident occurred which caused the scales to fall suddenly from the astonished mother's eyes, and in a moment revealed to her the extent of the risk and mischief she had so heedlessly incurred. The carriage was at the door, and it struck Mrs Rushton as she was descending the stairs that Mademoiselle de Tourville, who had complained of headache in the morning, would like to take an airing with her. The sound of the harp issuing from the drawing-room, and the faintly distinguished tones of her voice in some plaintive silver melody, perhaps suggested the invitation; and thither the mistress of the mansion at once proceeded. The folding-doors of the back drawing-room were partially open when Mrs Rushton, on kind thoughts intent, entered the front apartment. Mademoiselle de Tourville was seated with her back towards her at the harp, pouring forth with her thrilling and delicious voice a French romaunt; and there, with his head supported on his elbow,

which rested on the marble chimney-piece, stood her son, Arthur Rushton, gazing at the apparently unconscious songstress with a look so full of devoted tenderness—so completely revealing the intensity of passion by which he was possessed—that Mrs Rushton started with convulsive affright, and could not for several minutes give articulation to the dismay and rage which choked her utterance. Presently, however, her emotions found expression, and a storm of vituperative abuse was showered upon the head of the astonished Eugénie, designated as an artful *intrigante*, a designing pauper, who had insinuated herself into the establishment for the sole purpose of entrapping Mr Arthur Rushton—with a great deal more to the same effect. Mademoiselle de Tourville, who had first been too much surprised by the unexpected suddenness of the attack to quite comprehend the intent and direction of the blows, soon recovered her self-possession and hauteur. A smile of contempt curled her beautiful lip, as, taking advantage of a momentary pause in Mrs Rushton's breathless tirade, she said: 'Permit me, madam, to observe that if, as you seem to apprehend, your son has contemplated honouring me by the offer of an alliance with his ancient House'—Her look at this moment glanced upon the dreadfully agitated young man; the expression of disdainful bitterness vanished in an instant from her voice and features; and after a few moments, she added, with sad eyes bent upon the floor: 'That he could not have made a more unhappy choice—more unfortunate for him, more impossible for me!' She then hastily left the apartment, and before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, had left the house in a hackney-coach.

The scene which followed between the mother and son was a violent and distressing one. Mr Rushton, goaded to fury by his mother's attack upon Mademoiselle de

Tourville, cast off the habit of deference and submission which he had always worn in her presence, and asserted with vehemence his right to wed with whom he pleased, and declared that no power on earth should prevent his marrying the lady just driven ignominiously from the house, if she could be brought to accept the offer of his hand and fortune! Mrs Rushton fell into passionate hysterics; and her son, having first summoned her maid, withdrew to ruminate on Mademoiselle de Tourville's concluding sentence, which troubled him far more than what he deemed the injustice of his mother.

When Mrs Rushton, by the aid of water, pungent essences, and the relief which even an hour of time seldom fails to yield in such cases, had partially recovered her equanimity, she determined, after careful consideration of the best course of action, to consult a solicitor of eminence, well acquainted with her late husband, upon the matter. She had a dim notion that the Alien Act, if it could be put in motion, might rid her of Mademoiselle de Tourville and her friends. Thus resolving, and ever scrupulous as to appearances, she carefully smoothed her ruffled plumage, changed her disordered dress, and directed the carriage, which had been dismissed, to be again brought round to the door. 'Mary,' she added a few moments afterwards, 'bring me my jewel-case—the small one: you will find it in Made—— in that French person's dressing-room.'

Mary Austin reappeared in answer to the violent ringing of her impatient lady's bell, and stated that the jewel-case could nowhere be found in Mademoiselle's dressing-room. 'Her clothes, everything belonging to her, had been taken out of the wardrobe, and carried away, and perhaps that also, in mistake no doubt.'

'Nonsense, woman!' replied Mrs Rushton. 'I left it

not long ago on her toilet-glass. I intended to shew her a purchase I had made, and not finding her, left it as I tell you.'

Another search was made with the same ill success. Mary Austin afterwards said that when she returned to her mistress the second time, to say that the jewel-case was certainly gone, an expression of satisfaction instead of anger, it seemed to her, glanced across the face of Mrs Rushton, who immediately left the room, and in a few minutes afterwards was driven off in the carriage.

About an hour after her departure I called at Harley Street for Arthur Rushton, with whom I had engaged to go that evening to the theatre to witness Mrs Siddons's *Lady Macbeth*, which neither of us had yet seen. I found him in a state of calmed excitement, if I may so express myself; and after listening with much interest to the minute account he gave me of what had passed, I, young and inexperienced as I was in such affairs, took upon myself to suggest that, as the lady he nothing doubted was as irreproachable in character as she was confessedly charming and attractive in person and manners, and as he was unquestionably his own master, Mrs Rushton's opposition was not likely to be of long continuance; and that as to *Mademoiselle de Tourville's* somewhat discouraging expression, such sentences from the lips of ladies—

That would be wooed, and not unsought be won—

were seldom, if ever, I had understood, to be taken in a literal and positive sense. Under this mild and soothing treatment Mr Rushton gradually threw off a portion of the load that oppressed him, and we set off in tolerably cheerful mood for the theatre.

Mrs Siddons's magnificent and appalling impersonation over, we left the house; he, melancholy and sombre as I

had found him in Harley Street, and I in by no means a gay or laughing mood. We parted at my door, and whether it was the effect of the tragedy, so wonderfully realised in its chief creation, or whether coming events *do* sometimes cast their shadows before, I cannot say, but I know that an hour after Rushton's departure I was still sitting alone, my brain throbbing with excitement, and so nervous and impressionable, that a sudden, vehement knocking at the street entrance caused me to spring up from my chair with a terrified start, and before I could master the impulsive emotion, the room door was thrown furiously open, and in reeled Arthur Rushton—pale, haggard, wild—his eyes ablaze with horror and affright! Had the ghost of Duncan suddenly gleamed out of the viewless air, I could not have been more startled—awed!

'She is dead!—poisoned!' he shrieked with maniacal fury; 'killed!—murdered!—and by *her*!'

I gasped for breath, and could hardly articulate: 'What! whom?'

'My mother!' he shouted with the same furious vehemence—'Killed! by *her*! Oh, horror!—horror!—horror!' and exhausted by the violence of his emotions, the unfortunate gentleman staggered, shuddered violently, as if shaken by an ague fit, and fell heavily—for I was too confounded to yield him timely aid—on the floor.

As soon as I could rally my scattered senses, I caused medical aid to be summoned, and got him to bed. Blood was freely taken from both arms, and he gradually recovered consciousness. Leaving him in kind and careful hands, I hurried off to ascertain what possible foundation there could be for the terrible tidings so strangely announced.

I found the establishment in Harley Street in a state of the wildest confusion and dismay. Mrs Rushton *was* dead; that, at all events, was no figment of sudden insanity, and

incredible, impossible rumours were flying from mouth to mouth with bewildering rapidity and incoherence. The name of Mademoiselle de Tourville was repeated in every variety of abhorrent emphasis; but it was not till I obtained an interview with Mrs Rushton's solicitor that I could understand what really had occurred, or, to speak more properly, what was suspected. Mrs Rushton had made a deposition, of which Mr Twyte related to me the essential points. The deceased lady had gone out in her carriage with the express intention of calling on him, the solicitor, to ascertain if it would be possible to apply the Alien Act to Mademoiselle de Tourville and her father, in order to get them sent out of the country. Mr Twyte did not happen to be at home, and Mrs Rushton immediately drove to the De Tourvilles' lodgings in King Street, Holborn, with the design, she admitted, of availing herself of what she was in her own mind satisfied was the purely accidental taking away of a jewel-case, to terrify Mademoiselle de Tourville, by the threat of a criminal charge into leaving the country, or at least to bind herself not to admit, under any circumstances, of Mr Arthur Rushton's addresses. She found Eugénie in a state of extraordinary, and it seemed painful excitement; and the young lady entreated that whatever Mrs Rushton had to say should be reserved for another opportunity, when she would calmly consider whatever Mrs Rushton had to urge. The unfortunate lady became somewhat irritated at Mademoiselle de Tourville's obstinacy, and the unruffled contempt with which she treated the charge of robbery, even after finding the missing jewel-case in a band-box, into which it had been thrust with some brushes and other articles in the hurry of leaving. Mrs Rushton was iterating her threats in a loud tone of voice, and moved towards the bell to direct, she said, the landlord to send for a constable, but with no

intention whatever of doing so, when Mademoiselle de Tourville caught her suddenly by the arm, and bade her step into the next room. Mrs Rushton mechanically obeyed, and was led in silence to the side of a bed, of which Eugénie suddenly drew the curtain, and displayed to her, with a significant and reproachful gesture, the pale, rigid countenance of the corpse of her father, who had, it appears, suddenly expired. The shock was terrible. Mrs Rushton staggered back into the sitting-room, sick and faint, sank into a chair, and presently asked for a glass of wine. 'We have no wine,' replied Mademoiselle de Tourville; 'but there is a cordial in the next room which may be better for you.' She was absent about a minute, and on returning, presented Mrs Rushton with a large wine-glassful of liquid, which that lady eagerly swallowed. The taste was strange, but not unpleasant; and instantly afterwards Mrs Rushton left the house. When the carriage reached Harley Street, she was found to be in a state of great prostration: powerful stimulants were administered, but her life was beyond the reach of medicine. She survived just long enough to depose to the foregoing particulars; upon which statement Mademoiselle de Tourville had been arrested, and was now in custody.

'You seem to have been very precipitate,' I exclaimed as soon as the solicitor had ceased speaking: 'there appears to be as yet no proof that the lady died of any other than natural causes.'

'You are mistaken,' rejoined Mr Twyte. 'There is no doubt on the subject in the minds of the medical gentlemen, although the *post-mortem* examination has not yet taken place. And, as if to put aside all doubt, the bottle from which this Eugénie de Tourville admits she took the cordial proves to contain distilled laurel-water, a deadly poison, curiously coloured and flavoured.'

Greatly perturbed, shocked, astonished as I was, my mind refused to admit, even for a moment, the probability, hardly the possibility, of Eugénie de Tourville's guilt. The reckless malignancy of spirit evinced by so atrocious an act dwelt not, I was sure, within that beauteous temple. The motives alleged to have actuated her—fear of a criminal charge admitted to be absurd, and desire to rid herself of an obstacle to her marriage with Arthur Rushton—seemed to me altogether strained and inapplicable. The desperation of unreasoning hate could alone have prompted such a deed; for detection was inevitable, had, in truth, been courted rather than attempted to be avoided.

My reasoning made no change in the conclusions of Mr Twyte the attorney for the prosecution, and I hastened home to administer such consolation to Arthur Rushton as might consist in the assurance of my firm conviction that his beloved mother's life had not been wilfully taken away by Eugénie de Tourville. I found him still painfully agitated; and the medical attendant told me it was feared by Dr Hughes that brain fever would supervene if the utmost care was not taken to keep him as quiet and composed as, under the circumstances, was possible. I was, however, permitted a few minutes' conversation with him; and my reasoning, or, more correctly, my confidently-expressed belief—for his mind seemed incapable of following my argument, which it indeed grasped faintly at, but slipped from, as it were, in an instant—appeared to relieve him wonderfully. I also promised him that no legal or pecuniary assistance should be wanting in the endeavour to clear Mademoiselle de Tourville of the dreadful imputation preferred against her. I then left him. The anticipation of the physician was unfortunately realised: the next morning he was in a raging fever, and his life, I was informed, was in very imminent danger.

It was a distracting time ; but I determinedly, and with much self-effort, kept down the nervous agitation which might have otherwise rendered me incapable of fulfilling the duties I had undertaken to perform. By eleven o'clock in the forenoon I had secured the active and zealous services of Mr White, one of the most celebrated of the criminal attorneys of that day. By application in the proper quarter, we obtained immediate access to the prisoner, who was temporarily confined in a separate room in the Red Lion Square Lock-up House. Mademoiselle de Tourville, although exceedingly pale, agitated, and nervous, still looked as lustrously pure, as radiantly innocent of evil thought or deed, as on the day that I first beheld her. The practised eye of the attorney scanned her closely. 'As innocent of this charge,' he whispered, 'as you or I.' I tendered my services to the unfortunate young lady with an earnestness of manner which testified more than any words could have done how entirely my thoughts acquitted her of offence. Her looks thanked me ; and when I hinted at the promise exacted of me by Arthur Rushton, a bright blush for an instant mantled the pale marble of her cheeks and forehead, indicating, with the tears which suddenly filled and trembled in her beautiful eyes, a higher sentiment, I thought, than mere gratitude. She gave us her unreserved confidence ; by which, after careful sifting, we obtained only the following by no means entirely satisfactory results :

Mademoiselle de Tourville and her father had escaped from the Terrorists of France by the aid of, and in company with, the Chevalier la Houssaye, with whom M. de Tourville had previously had but a very slight acquaintance. The chevalier soon professed a violent admiration for Eugénie ; and having contrived to lay M. de Tourville under heavy pecuniary obligations at play—many of them Mademoiselle de Tourville had only very lately discovered—prevailed

upon his debtor to exert his influence with his daughter to accept La Houssaye's hand in marriage. After much resistance, Mademoiselle de Tourville, overcome by the commands, entreaties, prayers of her father, consented, but only on condition that the marriage should not take place till their return to France, which it was thought need not be very long delayed, and that no more money obligations should in the meantime be incurred by her father. La Houssaye vehemently objected to delay; but finding Eugénie inexorable, sullenly acquiesced. It was precisely at this time that the engagement with Mrs Rushton was accepted. On the previous afternoon Mademoiselle de Tourville, on leaving Harley Street after the scene with Mrs Rushton, went directly home, and there found both her father and the chevalier in hot contention and excitement. As soon as La Houssaye saw her, he seized his hat, and rushed out of the apartment and house. Her father, who was greatly excited, had barely time to say that he had fortunately discovered the chevalier to be a married man, whose wife, a woman of property, was still living in Languedoc, when what had always been predicted would follow any unusual agitation happened: M. de Tourville suddenly placed his hand on his side, uttered a broken exclamation, fell into a chair, and expired. It was about two hours after this melancholy event that Mrs Rushton arrived. The account before given of the interview which followed was substantially confirmed by Mademoiselle de Tourville; who added, that the cordial she had given Mrs Rushton was one her father was in the constant habit of taking when in the slightest degree excited, and that she was about to give him some when he suddenly fell dead.

We had no doubt, none whatever, that this was the whole, literal truth, as far as the knowledge of Mademoiselle de Tourville extended; but how could we impart that

impression to an Old Bailey jury of those days, deprived as we should be of the aid of counsel to address the jury, when in reality a speech, pointing to the improbabilities arising from character, and the altogether *unguilty-like* mode of administering the fatal liquid, was the only possible defence? Cross-examination promised nothing; for the evidence would consist of the dying deposition of Mrs Rushton, the finding of the laurel-water, and the medical testimony as to the cause of death. The only person upon whom suspicion glanced was La Houssaye, and that in a vague and indistinct manner. Still, it was necessary to find him without delay, and Mr White at once sought him at his lodgings, of which Mademoiselle de Tourville furnished the address. He had left the house suddenly with all his luggage early in the morning, and our efforts to trace him proved fruitless. In the meantime the *post-mortem* examination of the body had taken place, and a verdict of wilful murder against Eugénie de Tourville had been unhesitatingly returned. She was soon afterwards committed to Newgate for trial.

The Old Bailey session was close at hand, and Arthur Rushton, though immediate danger was over, was still in too delicate and precarious a state to be informed of the true position of affairs when the final day of trial arrived. The case had excited little public attention. It was not the fashion in those days to exaggerate the details of crime, nor, *especially before trial*, to give the wings of the morning to every fact or fiction that Rumour with her busy tongue obscurely whispered. Twenty lines of *The Times* would contain the published record of the commitment of Eugénie de Tourville for poisoning her mistress, Caroline Rushton; and—alas! spite of the crippled but earnest efforts of the eminent counsel we had retained, and the eloquent innocence of her appearance and demeanour—her conviction and

condemnation to death without hope of mercy ! My brain swam as the measured tones of the recorder, commanding the almost immediate and violent destruction of that beautiful master-piece of God, fell upon my ear ; and had not Mr White, who saw how greatly I was affected, fairly dragged me out of court into the open air, I should have fainted. I scarcely remember how I got home—in a coach I believe ; but face Rushton after that dreadful scene with a kindly-meant deception—*lie*—in my mouth, I could not, had a king's crown been the reward. I retired to my chamber, and on the plea of indisposition directed that I should on no account be disturbed. Night had fallen, and it was growing somewhat late, when I was startled out of the painful reverie in which I was still absorbed by the sudden pulling up of a furiously-driven coach, followed by a thundering summons at the door, similar to that which aroused me on the evening of Mrs Rushton's death. I seized my hat, rushed down-stairs, and opened the door. It was Mr White !

‘Well?—well?’ I ejaculated.

‘Quick—quick!’ he exclaimed in reply. ‘La Houssaye—he is found—has sent for us—quick ! for life—life is on our speed !’

I was in the vehicle in an instant. In less than ten minutes we had reached our destination—a house in Duke Street, Manchester Square.

‘He is still alive,’ replied a young man in answer to Mr White's hurried inquiry. We rapidly ascended the stairs, and in the front apartment of the first floor beheld one of the saddest, mournfulest spectacles which the world can offer—a fine, athletic man, still in the bloom of natural health and vigour, and whose pale features, but for the tracings there of fierce, ungoverned passions, were strikingly handsome and intellectual, stretched by his own act upon

the bed of death ! It was La Houssaye ! Two gentlemen were with him—one a surgeon, and the other evidently a clergyman, and, as I subsequently found, a magistrate, who had been sent for by the surgeon. A faint smile gleamed over the face of the dying man as we entered, and he motioned feebly to a sheet of paper, which, closely written upon, was lying upon a table placed near a sofa upon which the unhappy suicide was reclining. Mr White snatched, and eagerly perused it. I could see by the vivid lighting up of his keen gray eye that it was, in his opinion, satisfactory and sufficient.

‘This,’ said Mr White, ‘is your solemn deposition, knowing yourself to be dying?’

‘Yes, yes,’ murmured La Houssaye; ‘the truth—the truth!’

‘The declaration of a man,’ said the clergyman with some asperity of tone, ‘who defyingly, unrepentingly, rushes into the presence of his Creator, can be of little value!’

‘Ha!’ said the dying man, rousing himself by a strong effort; ‘I repent—yes—yes—I repent! I believe—do you hear?—and repent—believe. Put that down,’ he added, in tones momentarily feebler and more husky, as he pointed to the paper; ‘put that down, or—or perhaps—Eu—génie—perhaps’——

As he spoke, the faint light that had transiently kindled his glazing eye was suddenly quenched; he remained for perhaps half a minute raised on his elbow, and with his outstretched finger pointing towards the paper, gazing blindly upon vacancy. Then the arm dropped, and he fell back dead !

We escaped as quickly as we could from this fearful death-room, and I found that the deposition which Mr White brought away with him gave a full, detailed account,

written in the French language, of the circumstances which led to the death of Mrs Rushton.

La Houssaye, finding that M. de Tourville had by some means discovered the secret of his previous marriage, and that consequently all hope of obtaining the hand of Eugénie, whom he loved with all the passion of his fiery nature, would be gone unless De Tourville could be prevented from communicating with his daughter, resolved to compass the old man's instant destruction. The chevalier persuaded himself that, as he should manage it, death would be attributed to the affection of the heart, from which M. de Tourville had so long suffered. He procured the distilled laurel-water—how and from whom was minutely explained—coloured, flavoured it to resemble as nearly as possible the cordial which he knew M. de Tourville—and he only—was in the habit of frequently taking. A precisely similar bottle he also procured—the shop at which it was purchased was described—and when he called in King Street, he found no difficulty, in an unobserved moment, of substituting one bottle for the other. That containing the real cordial he was still in possession of, and it would be found in his valise. The unexpected arrival of Mademoiselle de Tourville frustrated his design, and he rushed in fury and dismay from the house. A few hours afterwards, he heard of the sudden death of M. de Tourville, and attributing it to his having taken a portion of the simulated cordial, he, La Houssaye, fearful of consequences, hastily and secretly changed his abode. He had subsequently kept silence till the conviction of Eugénie left him no other alternative, if he would not see her perish on the scaffold, than a full and unreserved confession. This done—Eugénie saved, but lost to him—he had nothing more to live for in the world, and should leave it.

This was the essence of the document ; and all the parts of it which were capable of corroborative proof having been substantiated, a free pardon issued from the crown—the technical mode of quashing an unjust criminal verdict—and Mademoiselle de Tourville was restored to liberty.

She did not return to France. Something more perhaps than a year after the demonstration of her innocence, she was married to Arthur Rushton in the Sardinian Catholic Chapel, London, the bridegroom having by her influence been induced to embrace the faith of Rome. The establishments in Harley Street and Mayfair were broken up ; and the newly-espoused pair settled in the county Galway, Ireland, where Mr Rushton made extensive landed purchases. They have lived very happily, and been blessed with a large and amiable family.



CONFESSIONS OF AN ATTORNEY.

FRAUDULENT INSURANCE.

BESIDES being the confidential advisers, attorneys are the 'confessors' of modern England; and the revelations—delicate, serious, not unfrequently involving life as well as fortune and character—confided to the purchased fidelity and professional honour of men whom romancers of all ages have stereotyped as the ghouls and vampires of civilised society, are, it is impossible to deny, as rarely divulged as those which the penitents of the Greek and Latin churches impart to their spiritual guides and helpers; and this possibly for the somewhat vulgar, but very sufficient reason, that 'a breach of confidence' would as certainly involve the professional ruin of an attorney as the commission of a felony. An able but eccentric juriconsult, Mr Jeremy Bentham, was desirous that attorneys should be compelled to disclose on oath whatever guilty secrets might be confided to them by their clients; the only objection to which

ingenious device for the conviction of rogues being, that if such a power existed, there would be no secrets to disclose ; and, as a necessary consequence, that the imperfectly-informed attorney would be unable to render his client the justice to which every person, however criminal, is clearly entitled—that of having his or her case presented before the court appointed to decide upon it in the best and most advantageous manner possible. Let it not be forgotten either that the attorney is the only real, practical defender of the humble and needy against the illegal oppressions of the rich and powerful—the shrewd, indomitable agent who gives prosaic reality to the figurative eloquence of old Chancellor Fortescue, when he says ‘ that the lightning may flash through, the thunder shake, the tempest beat upon the English peasant’s hut ; but the king of England, with all his army, cannot lift the latch to enter in.’ The chancellor of course meant that in this country overbearing violence cannot defy or put itself in the place of the law. This is quite true ; and why ? Chiefly because the attorney is ready, in all cases of *provable* illegality, with his potent strip of parchment summoning the great man before ‘ her Sovereign Lady the Queen,’ there to answer for his acts ; and the *richer* the offender, the more keen and eager Mr Attorney to prosecute the suit, however needy his own client ; for he is then sure of his costs, if he succeed ! Again I cheerfully admit the extreme vulgarity of the motive ; but its effect in protecting the legal rights of the humble is not, I contend, lessened because the reward of exertion and success is counted out in good, honest sovereigns, or notes of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

Thus much by way of conciliatory prologue to the narrative of a few incidents revealed in the attorney’s privileged confessional ; throughout which I have of course, in order

to avoid any possible recognition of those events or incidents, changed the name of every person concerned.

Our old city firm, then, which, I am happy to say, still flourishes under the able direction of our active successors, I will call—adopting the nomenclature appropriated to us by imaginative ladies and gentlemen who favour the world with fancy pen-and-ink portraits of the lawyer tribe—that of Flint and Sharp; Sharp being myself, and Flint the silver-haired old bachelor we buried a few weeks since in Kensal Green Cemetery.

‘Mr Andrews,’ said a clerk as he threw open the door of the inner office one afternoon. ‘Mr Jesse Andrews.’

‘Good-day, Mr Andrews,’ was my prompt and civil greeting: ‘I have good news for you. Take a chair.’

The good-humoured, rather intelligent, and somewhat clouded countenance of the new-comer brightened up at these words. ‘News from my cousin Archibald?’ he asked as he seated himself.

‘Yes. He laments your late failure, and commiserates the changed position and prospects of your wife and boy, little Archibald, his godson. You he has not much compassion for, inasmuch as he attributes your misfortunes entirely to mismanagement, and the want of common prudence.’

‘Candid, certainly,’ grumbled out Mr Jesse Andrews; ‘but an odd sort of good news!’

‘His deeds are kinder than his words. He will allow, till Archibald attains his majority—— Let me see: how old is that boy of yours now?’

‘Ten. He was two years old when his godfather went to India.’

‘Well, then, you will receive two hundred pounds per annum, payable half-yearly, in advance, for the next ten years—that is of course if your son lives—in order to

enable you to bring him up and educate him properly. After that period has elapsed, your cousin intimates that he will place the young man advantageously; and I do not doubt will do something for you, should you not by that time have conquered a fair position for yourself.'

'Is that all?' said Mr Andrews.

'All! Why, what did you expect?'

'Two or three thousand pounds to set me afloat again. I know of a safe speculation, that with, say three thousand pounds capital, would realise a handsome fortune in no time.'

Mr Jesse Andrews, I may observe, was one of that numerous class of persons who are always on the threshold of realising millions—the only and constant obstacle being the want of a sufficient 'capital.'

I condoled with him upon his disappointment; but as words, however civil, avail little in the way of 'capital,' Mr Jesse Andrews, having pocketed the first half-yearly instalment of the annuity, made his exit in by no means a gracious or grateful frame of mind.

Two other half-yearly payments were duly paid him. When he handed me the receipt on the last occasion, he said, in a sort of off-hand, careless way: 'I suppose, if Archy were to die, those payments would cease?'

'Perhaps not,' I replied unthinkingly. 'At all events not, I should say, till you and your wife were in some way provided for. But your son is not ill?' I added.

'No, no; not at present,' replied Andrews, colouring, and with a confusion of manner which surprised me not a little. It flashed across my mind that the boy was dead, and that Andrews, in order not to risk the withdrawal or suspension of the annuity, had concealed the fact from us.

'Let me see,' I resumed; 'we have your present address—Norton Folgate, I think?'

‘Yes, certainly you have.’

‘I shall very likely call in a day or two to see Mrs Andrews and your son.’

The man smiled in a reassured, half-sardonic manner. ‘Do,’ he answered. ‘Archy is alive, and very well, thank God!’

This confidence dispelled the suspicion I had momentarily entertained, and five or six weeks passed away, during which Andrews and his affairs were almost as entirely absent from my thoughts as if no such man existed.

About the expiration of that time, Mr Jesse Andrews unexpectedly revisited the office, and as soon as I was disengaged, was ushered into my private room. He was habited in the deepest mourning, and it naturally struck me that either his wife or son was dead—an impression, however, which a closer examination of his countenance did not confirm, knowing as I did how affectionate a husband and father he was, with all his faults and follies, reputed to be. He looked flurried, nervous, certainly; but there was no grief, no sorrow, in the restless, disturbed glances which he directed to the floor, the ceiling, the window, the fireplace, the chairs, the table—everywhere, in fact, except towards my face.

‘What is the matter, Mr Andrews?’ I gravely inquired, seeing that he did not appear disposed to open the conversation.

‘A great calamity, sir—a great calamity,’ he hurriedly and confusedly answered, his face still persistently averted from me—‘has happened! Archy is dead!’

‘Dead!’ I exclaimed, considerably shocked. ‘God bless me! when did this happen?’

‘Three weeks ago,’ was the reply. ‘He died of cholera.’

‘Of cholera!’ This occurred, I should state, in 1830.

‘Yes: he was very assiduously attended throughout his sufferings, which were protracted and severe, by the eminent Dr Parkinson, a highly-respectable and skilled practitioner, as you doubtless, sir, are aware.’

I could not comprehend the man. This dry, unconcerned, business-sort of gabble was not the language of a suddenly-bereaved parent, and one, too, who had lost a considerable annuity by his son’s death. What could it mean? I was in truth fairly puzzled.

After a considerable interval of silence, which Mr Andrews, whose eyes continued to wander in every direction except that of mine, shewed no inclination to break, I said: ‘It will be necessary for me to write immediately to your cousin, Mr Archibald Andrews. I trust, for your sake, the annuity will be continued; but of course, till I hear from him, the half-yearly payments must be suspended.’

‘Certainly, certainly; I naturally expected that would be the case,’ said Andrews, still in the same quick, hurried tone. ‘Quite so.’

‘You have nothing further to say, I suppose?’ I remarked after another dead pause, during which it was very apparent that he was labouring with something to which he nervously hesitated to give utterance.

‘No—yes—that is, I wished to consult you upon a matter of business—connected with—with a life-assurance office.’

‘A life-assurance office.’

‘Yes.’ The man’s pale face flushed crimson, and his speech became more and more hurried as he went on. ‘Yes: fearing, Mr Sharp, that should Archy die, we might be left without resource, I resolved, after mature deliberation, to effect an insurance on his life for four thousand pounds.’

‘Four thousand pounds!’

‘Yes. All necessary preliminaries were gone through. The medical gentleman—since dead of the cholera, by the way—examined the boy of course, and the insurance was legally effected for four thousand pounds, payable at his death.’

I did not speak; a suspicion too horrible to be hinted at held me dumb.

‘Unfortunately,’ Andrews continued, ‘this insurance was only effected about a fortnight before poor Archy’s death, and the office refuses payment, although, as I have told you, the lad was attended to the very hour of his death by Dr Parkinson, a highly-respectable, most unexceptionable gentleman. Very much so indeed.’

‘I quite agree in that,’ I answered after a while. ‘Dr Parkinson is a highly-respectable and eminent man. What reason,’ I added, ‘do the company assign for non-payment?’

‘The very recent completion of the policy.’

‘Nonsense! How can that fact, *standing alone*, affect your claim?’

‘I do not know,’ Andrews replied; and all this time I had not been able to look fairly in his face; ‘but they *do* refuse; and I am anxious that your firm should take the matter in hand, and sue them for the amount.’

‘I must first see Dr Parkinson,’ I answered, ‘and convince myself that there is no *legitimate* reason for repudiating the policy.’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ he replied.

‘I will write to you to-morrow,’ I said, rising to terminate the conference, ‘after I have seen Dr Parkinson, and state whether we will or not take proceedings against the insurance company on your behalf.’

He thanked me and hurried off.

Dr Parkinson confirmed Mr Jesse Andrews in every

particular. He had attended the boy, a fine, light-haired lad of eleven or twelve years of age, from not long after his seizure till his death. He suffered dreadfully, and died unmistakably of Asiatic cholera, and of nothing else; of which same disease a servant and a female lodger in the same house had died just previously. 'It is of course,' Dr Parkinson remarked in conclusion, 'as unfortunate for the company as it is strangely lucky for Andrews; but there is no valid reason for refusing payment.'

Upon this representation we wrote the next day to the assurance people, threatening proceedings on behalf of Mr Jesse Andrews.

Early on the morrow one of the managing directors called on us, to state the reasons which induced the company to hesitate at recognising the plaintiff's claim. In addition to the doubts suggested by the brief time which had elapsed from the date of the policy to the death of the child, there were several other slight circumstances of corroborative suspicion. The chief of these was, that a neighbour had declared he heard the father indulging in obstreperous mirth in a room adjoining that in which the corpse lay only about two hours after his son had expired. This unseemly, scandalous hilarity of her husband the wife appeared to faintly remonstrate against. The directors had consequently resolved *non obstante* the declaration of Dr Parkinson—who might, they argued, have been deceived—to have the body exhumed in order to a post-mortem examination as to the true cause of death. If the parents voluntarily agreed to this course, a judicial application to enforce it would be unnecessary, and all doubts on the matter could be quietly set at rest. I thought the proposal, under the circumstances, reasonable, and called on Mr and Mrs Andrews to obtain their concurrence. Mrs Andrews was, I found, absent in the country, but her husband was at

home; and he, on hearing the proposal, was, I thought, a good deal startled—shocked rather—a natural emotion perhaps.

‘Who—who,’ he said after a few moments’ silent reflection—‘who is to conduct this painful, revolting inquiry?’

‘Dr Parkinson will be present, with Mr Humphrey the surgeon, and Dr Curtis the newly-appointed physician to the assurance office, in place of Dr Morgan, who died, as you are aware, a short time since of cholera.’

‘True. Ah, well then,’ he answered almost with alacrity, ‘be it as they wish. Dr Parkinson will see fair-play.’

The examination was effected, and the result was a confirmation, beyond doubt or quibble, that death, as Dr Parkinson had declared, had been solely occasioned by cholera. The assurance company still hesitated; but as this conduct could now only be looked upon as perverse obstinacy, we served them with a writ at once. They gave in; and the money was handed over to Mr Jesse Andrews, whose joy at his sudden riches did not, I was forced to admit, appear to be in the slightest degree damped by any feeling of sadness for the loss of an only child.

We wrote to inform Mr Archibald Andrews of these occurrences, and to request further instructions with regard to the annuity hitherto paid to his cousin. A considerable time would necessarily elapse before an answer could be received, and in the meantime Mr Jesse Andrews plunged headlong into the speculation he had been long hankering to engage in, and was, he informed me a few weeks afterwards, on the royal road to a magnificent fortune.

Clouds soon gathered over this brilliant prospect. The partner, whose persuasive tongue and brilliant imagination had induced Mr Andrews to join him with his four thousand pounds, proved to be an arrant cheat and swindler; and

Mr Andrews's application to us for legal help and redress was just too late to prevent the accomplished dealer in moonshine and delusion from embarking at Liverpool for America, with every penny of the partnership funds in his pockets!

A favourable reply from Mr Archibald Andrews had now become a question of vital importance to his cousin, who very impatiently awaited its arrival. It came at last. Mr Andrews had died rather suddenly at Bombay a short time before my letter arrived there, after executing in triplicate a will, of which one of the copies was forwarded to me. By this instrument his property—about thirty-five thousand pounds, the greatest portion of which had been remitted from time to time for investment in the British funds—was disposed of as follows: Five thousand pounds to his cousin Jesse Andrews, for the purpose of educating and maintaining Archibald Andrews, the testator's godson, till he should have attained the age of twenty-one, and the whole of the remaining thirty thousand pounds to be then paid over to Archibald, with accumulated interest. In the event, however, of the death of his godson, the entire property was devised to another more distant and wealthier cousin, Mr Newton and *his* son Charles, on precisely similar conditions, with the exception that an annuity of seventy pounds, payable to Jesse Andrews and his wife during their lives, was charged upon it.

Two letters were despatched the same evening—one to the fortunate cousin, Mr Newton, who lived within what was then known as the twopenny post delivery, and another to Mr Jesse Andrews, who had taken up his temporary abode in a cottage near St Albans, Hertfordshire. These missives informed both gentlemen of the arrival of the Indian mail, and the, to them, important despatches it contained.

Mr Newton was early at the office on the following morning, and perused the will with huge content. He was really quite sorry, though, for poor Cousin Jesse: the loss of his son was a sad stroke, much worse than this of a fortune, which he might have expected to follow as a matter of course. And the annuity, Mr Newton thoughtfully observed, was, after all, no contemptible provision for two persons, without family, and of modest requirements.

A very different scene was enacted when, late in the evening, and just as I was about to leave the office, Mr Jesse Andrews rushed in, white as a sheet, haggard, and wild with passion. 'What devil's fables are these you write me?' he burst forth the instant he had gained the threshold of the room. 'How dare you,' he went on, almost shrieking with fury—'how dare you attempt to palm off these accursed lies on me? Archy rich—rich—and I—— But it is a lie! An infernal device got up to torture me—to drive me wild, distracted—mad.' The excited man literally foamed with rage, and so astonished was I, that it was a minute or two before I could speak or move. At last I rose, closed the door—for the clerks in the outer office were hearers and witnesses of this outbreak—and led the way to an inner and more private apartment. 'Come with me, Mr Andrews,' I said, 'and let us talk this matter calmly over.'

He mechanically followed, threw himself into a chair, and listened with frenzied impatience to the reading of the will.

'A curse is upon me,' he shouted, jumping up as I concluded: 'the curse of God—a judgment upon the crime I but the other day committed—a crime, as I thought—dolt, idiot that I was—so cunningly contrived, so cleverly executed! Fool, villain, madman that I have been; for now, when fortune is tendered for my acceptance, I dare

not put forth my hand to grasp it; fortune, too, not only for me, but—— O God, it will kill us both, Martha as well as me, though I alone am to blame for this infernal chance!’

This outburst appeared to relieve him, and he sank back into his chair somewhat calmer. I could understand nothing of all that rhapsody, knowing as I did that his son Archibald had died from natural causes. ‘It *is* a severe blow,’ I said in as soothing a tone as I could assume; ‘a very great disappointment: still, you are secured from extreme poverty—from anything like absolute want’——

‘It is not that—it is not that!’ he broke in, though not quite so wildly as before. ‘Look you, Mr Sharp, I will tell you all! There may be some mode of extrication from this terrible predicament, and I must have your advice professionally upon it.’

‘Go on; I will advise you to the best of my ability.’

‘Here it is, then: Archy, my son Archy, is alive!—alive! and well in health as either you or I!’

I was thunder-struck. Here was indeed a revelation.

‘Alive and well,’ continued Andrews. ‘Listen: when the cholera began to spread so rapidly, I bethought me of insuring the boy’s life in case of the worst befalling, but not, as I hope for mercy, with the slightest thought of harming a hair of his head. This was done. Very soon the terrific disease approached our neighbourhood; and my wife took Archy to a country lodging, returning herself the same evening. The next day our only servant was attacked, and died. A few hours after that our first-floor lodger, a widow of the name of Mason, who had been with us but a very short time, was attacked. She suffered dreadfully; and her son, a boy about the age of Archy, and with just his hair and complexion, took ill also. The woman was delirious with pain; and before effective medical aid could be obtained

—she was seized in the middle of the night—she expired. Her son, who had been removed into another room, became rapidly worse, and we sent for Dr Parkinson: the poor fellow was also partially delirious with pain, and clung piteously round my wife's neck, calling her mother, and imploring her to relieve him. Dr Parkinson arrived, and at first sight of the boy, said: "Your son is very ill, Mrs Andrews—I fear past recovery; but we will see what can be done." I swear to you, Mr Sharp, that it was not till this moment the device which has ruined us flashed across my brain. I cautioned my wife in a whisper not to undeceive the doctor, who prescribed the most active remedies, and was in the room when the lad died. You know the rest. And now, sir, tell me, can anything be done—any device suggested to retrieve this miserable blunder, this terrible mistake?'

'This infamous crime, you should say, Mr Andrews,' I replied; 'for the commission of which you are liable to be transported for life.'

'Yes, crime; no doubt that is the true word! But must the innocent child suffer for his father's offence?'

'That is the only consideration that would induce me to wag a finger in the business. Like many other clever rogues, you are caught in the trap you limed for others. Come to me to-morrow: I will think over the matter between this and then; but at present I can say nothing. Stay,' I added, as his hand was on the door; 'the identity of your son can be proved, I suppose, by better evidence than your own?'

'Certainly, certainly.'

'That will do, then; I will see you in the morning.'

If it should cross the mind of any reader that I ought to have given this self-confessed felon into custody, I beg to remind him that for the reasons previously stated, such a

course on my part was out of the question—impossible ; and that had it *not* been impossible I should do so, Mr Jesse Andrews would not have intrusted me with his criminal secret. The only question now therefore was how, without compromising this guilty client, the god-father's legacy could be secured for the innocent son.

A conference the next morning with Mr Flint resulted in our sending for Mr Jesse Andrews, and advising him, for fear of accidents or miscarriage in our plans, to betake himself to the kingdom of France for a short time. We had then no treaty of extradition with that country. As soon as I knew he was safely out of the realm, I waited upon the insurance people.

‘The money ought not to have been received by Jesse Andrews, you say, Mr Sharp?’ observed the managing gentleman, looking keenly in my face.

‘Precisely. It ought not to have been received by him.’

‘And *why* not, Mr Sharp?’

‘That is quite an unnecessary question, and one that you know I should not answer if I could. That which chiefly concerns you is, that I am ready to return the four thousand pounds at once, here on the spot, and that delays are dangerous. If you refuse, why of course’—and I rose from my chair—‘I must take back the money.’

‘Stay—stay ! I will just consult with one or two gentlemen, and be with you again almost immediately.’

In about five minutes he returned. ‘Well, Mr Sharp,’ he said, ‘we had, I suppose, better take the money—obtained, as you say, by mistake.’

‘Not at all ; I said nothing about mistake. I told you it ought not to have been received by Andrews !’

‘Well—well ; I understand. I must, I suppose, give you a receipt?’

‘Undoubtedly; and, if you please, precisely in this form.’

I handed him a copy on a slip of paper. He ran it over, smiled, transcribed it on a stamp, signed it, and as I handed him a cheque for the amount, placed it in my hands. We mutually bowed, and I went my way.

Notwithstanding the opposition of Mr Newton, who was naturally furious at the unexpected turn the affair had taken, the identity of the boy—whom that gentleman persisted in asserting to be dead and buried—was clearly established; and Mr Archibald Andrews, on the day he became of age, received possession of his fortune. The four thousand pounds had of course been repaid out of Jesse Andrews’s legacy. That person has, so to speak, since skulked through life a mark for the covert scorn of every person acquainted with the very black transaction here recorded. This was doubtless a much better fate than he deserved; and in strict, or poetical justice, his punishment ought unquestionably to have been much greater—more apparent also than it was, for example’s sake. But I am a man not of fiction, but of fact, and consequently relate events not as they precisely ought, but as they *do* occasionally occur in lawyers’ offices, and other unpoetical nooks and corners of this prosaic, matter-of-fact, working-day world.



BIGAMY OR NO BIGAMY?



THE firm of Flint and Sharp enjoyed, whether deservedly or not, when I was connected with it, as it still does, a high reputation for keen practice and shrewd business management. This kind of professional fame is usually far more profitable than the drum-and-trumpet variety of the same article ; or at least *we* found it so ; and often, from blush of morn to far later than dewy eve—which natural phenomena, by the way, were only emblematically observed by me during thirty busy years in the extinguishment of the street lamps at dawn and their reillumination at dusk—did my partner and I incessantly pursue our golden avocations ; deferring what are usually esteemed the pleasures of life—its banquets, music, flowers, and lettered ease—till the toil, and heat, and hurry of the day were past, and a calm, luminous evening, unclouded by care or anxiety, had arrived. This conduct may or may not have been wise ; but at all events it daily increased the connection and transactions of

the firm, and ultimately anchored us both very comfortably in the three per cents; and this too, I am bold to say, not without our having effected some good in our generation. This boast of mine, the following passage in the life of a distinguished client—whom our character for practical sagacity and professional shrewdness brought us—will, I think, be admitted to in some degree substantiate.

Our connection was a mercantile rather than an aristocratic one, and my surprise was therefore considerable, when, on looking through the office-blinds to ascertain what vehicle it was that had driven so rapidly up to the door, I observed a handsomely appointed carriage, with a coronet emblazoned on the panels, out of which a tall footman was handing a lady attired in deep but elegant mourning, and closely veiled. I instantly withdrew to my private room, and desired that the lady should be immediately admitted. My surprise was greatly increased when the graceful and still youthful visitor withdrew her veil, and disclosed the features of the Countess of Seyton, upon whose mild, luminous beauty, as rendered by the engraving from Sir Thomas Lawrence's picture, I had so frequently gazed with admiration. That rare and touching beauty was clouded now; and an intense expression of anxiety, fear—almost terror—gleamed from out the troubled depths of her fine dark eyes.

'The Countess of Seyton!' I half involuntarily exclaimed, as with my very best bow I handed her ladyship a chair.

'Yes. And you are a partner of this celebrated firm; are you not?'

I bowed again still more profoundly to this compliment, and modestly admitted that I was the Sharp of the firm her ladyship was pleased to entitle 'celebrated.'

'Then, Mr Sharp, I have to consult you professionally upon a matter of the utmost—the most vital importance to

me and mine.' Her ladyship then, with some confusion of manner, as if she did not know whether what she was doing was in accordance with strict etiquette or not, placed a Bank of England note, by way of retainer, before me. I put it back, explaining what the usage really was, and the countess replaced it in her purse.

'We shall be proud to render your ladyship any assistance in our power,' I said; 'but I understood the Messrs Jackson enjoyed the confidence of the house of Seyton?'

'Precisely. They are, so to speak, the hereditary solicitors of the family more than of any individual member of it; and therefore, though highly respectable persons, unfit to advise me in this particular matter. Besides,' she added with increasing tremor and hesitation, 'to deal with, and if possible foil, the individual by whom I am persecuted, requires an agent of keener sagacity than either of those gentlemen can boast of, sharper—more resolute men; more ——— You understand what I mean?'

'Perfectly, madam; and allow me to suggest that as it is probable our interview may be a somewhat prolonged one, your ladyship's carriage, which may attract attention, should be at once dismissed. The office of the family solicitors is, you are aware, not far off; and as we could not explain to them the reason which induces your ladyship to honour us with your confidence, it will be as well to avoid any chance of inquiry.'

'Lady Seyton acquiesced in my suggestion: the carriage was ordered home, and Mr Flint entering just at the time, we both listened with earnestness and anxiety to her communication. It is needless to repeat *verbatim* the somewhat prolix, exclamative narration of the countess: the essential facts were as follows.

'The Countess of Seyton, previous to her first marriage, was Miss Clara Hayley, second daughter of the Reverend

John Hayley, the rector of a parish in Devonshire. She married, when only nineteen years of age, a Captain Gosford. Her husband was ten years older than herself, and, as she discovered after marriage, was cursed with a morose and churlish temper and disposition. Previous to her acquaintance with Gosford, she had been intimate with, almost betrothed to Mr Arthur Kingston, a young gentleman connected with the peerage, and at that time heir-apparent to the great expectancies and actual poverty of his father, Sir Arthur Kingston. The haughty baronet, the instant he was made aware of the nature of his son's intimacy with the rector's daughter, packed the young man off to the continent on his travels. The Reverend John Hayley and his beautiful Clara were as proud as the baronet, and extremely indignant that it should be thought either of them wished to entrap or delude Arthur Kingston into an unequal or ineligible marriage. This feeling of pride and resentment aided the success of Mr Gosford's suit, and Clara Hayley, like many other rash, high-notioned young ladies, doomed herself to misery, in order to shew the world, and Mr Arthur Kingston and his proud father especially, that she had a spirit. The union was a most unhappy one. One child only, which died in its infancy, was born to them; and after being united somewhat more than two years, a separation, vehemently insisted on by the wife's father, took place, and the unhappily wedded daughter returned to her parent's roof. Mr Gosford—he had some time before sold out of the army—travelled about the country in search of amusement, and latterly of health (for his unhappy cankerous temper at last affected and broke down his never very robust physical constitution), accompanied for the twelvemonth preceding his death by a young man belonging to the medical profession, of the name of Chilton. Mr and Mrs Gosford

had been separated a few days less than three years, when the husband died, at the village of Swords in Ireland, and not far distant from Dublin. The intelligence was first conveyed to the widow by a paragraph in the *Freeman's Journal*, a Dublin newspaper; and by the following post a letter arrived from Mr Chilton, inclosing a ring which the deceased had requested should be sent to his wife, and a note, dictated just previous to his death-hour, in which he expressed regret for the past, and admitted that he alone had been to blame for the unhappy separation. A copy of his will, made nearly a twelvemonth previously, was also forwarded, by which he bequeathed his property, amounting to about three hundred pounds per annum, to a distant relative then residing in Australia. By a memorandum of a subsequent date, Mr Chilton was to have all the money and other personals he might die in *actual* possession of, after defraying the necessary funeral expenses. This will, Mr Chilton stated, the deceased gentleman had expressed a wish in his last moments to alter, but death had been too sudden for him to be able to give effect to that good but too long delayed intention.

It cannot be supposed that the long-before practically widowed wife grieved much at the final breaking of the chain which bound her to so ungenial a mate; but as Lady Seyton was entirely silent upon the subject, our supposition can only rest upon the fact, that Arthur Kingston—who had some time previously, in consequence of the death of the Earl of Seyton and his only son, an always weakly child, preceded a few months by that of his own father, the baronet, succeeded to the earldom and estates—on seeing the announcement of Gosford's death in the Dublin paper, hastened home from the continent, where he had continued to reside since his compelled departure six years before; and soon afterwards found his way into Devon-

shire, and so successfully pressed the renewed offer of his hand, that the wedding took place slightly within six months after the decease of Mr Gosford. Life passed brilliantly and happily with the earl and countess—to whom three children (a boy and two girls) were born—till about five months previous to the present time, when the earl, from being caught, when out riding, in a drenching shower of rain, was attacked by fever, and after an acute illness of only two or three days' duration, expired. The present earl was at the time just turned of five years of age.

This blow, we comprehended from the sudden tears which filled the beautiful eyes of the countess as she spoke of the earl's decease, was a severe one. Still, the grief of widowhood must have been greatly assuaged by love for her children, and not inconsiderably, after a while, we may be sure, by the brilliant position in which she was left—as, in addition to being splendidly jointured, she was appointed by her husband's will sole guardian of the young lord her son.

A terrible reverse awaited her. She was sitting with her father the rector, and her still unmarried sister, Jane Hayley, in the drawing-room of Seyton House, when a note was brought to her, signed Edward Chilton, the writer of which demanded an immediate and private interview, on, he alleged, the most important business. Lady Seyton remembered the name, and immediately acceded to the man's request. He announced in a brusque, insolent tone and manner, that Mr Gosford had not died at the time his death was announced to her, having then only fallen into a state of syncope, from which he had unexpectedly recovered, and had lived six months longer. 'The truth is,' added Chilton, 'that, chancing the other day to be looking over a *Peerage*, I noticed for the first time the

date of your marriage with the late Earl of Seyton, and I have now to inform you that it took place precisely eight days previous to Mr Gosford's death; that it was consequently no marriage at all; and that your son is no more Earl of Seyton than I am.'

This dreadful announcement, as one might expect, completely overcame the countess. She fainted, but not till she had heard and comprehended Chilton's hurried injunctions to secrecy and silence. He rang the bell for assistance, and then left the house. The mental agony of Lady Seyton on recovering consciousness was terrible, and she with great difficulty succeeded in concealing its cause from her anxious and wondering relatives. Another interview with Chilton appeared to confirm the truth of his story beyond doubt or question. He produced a formally drawn-up document, signed by one Pierce Cunningham, grave-digger of Swords, which set forth that Charles Gosford was buried on the 26th of June 1832, and that the inscription on his tombstone set forth that he had died June 23d of that year. Also a written averment of Patrick Mullins of Dublin, that he had lettered the stone at the head of the grave of Charles Gosford in Swords burying-ground in 1832, and that its date was, as stated by Pierce Cunningham, June 23, 1832.

'Have you copies of those documents?' asked Mr Flint.

'Yes: I have brought them with me,' the countess replied, and handed them to Mr Flint. 'In my terror and extremity,' continued her ladyship, 'and unguided by counsel—for till now I have not dared to speak upon the subject to any person—I have given this Chilton, at various times, large sums of money: but he is insatiable; and only yesterday—— I cannot repeat his audacious proposal: you will find it in this note.'

‘Marriage!’ exclaimed Mr Flint with a burst. He had read the note over my shoulder. ‘The scoundrel!’

My worthy partner was rather excited. The truth was, he had a Clara of his own at home—a dead sister’s child, very pretty, just about marriageable, and a good deal resembling, as he told me afterwards, our new and interesting client.

‘I would die a thousand deaths rather,’ resumed Lady Seyton in a low, tremulous voice, as she let fall her veil. ‘Can there,’ she added in a still fainter voice, ‘be anything done—anything’——

‘That depends entirely,’ interrupted Mr Flint, ‘upon whether this fine story is or is not a fabrication, got up for the purpose of extorting money. It seems to me, I must say, amazingly like one.’

‘Do you really think so?’ exclaimed the lady with joyful vehemence. The notion that Chilton was perhaps imposing on her credulity and fears seemed not to have struck her before.

‘What do you think, Sharp?’ said my partner.

I hesitated to give an opinion, as I did not share in the hope entertained by Flint. Detection was so certain, that I doubted if so cunning a person as Chilton appeared to be would have ventured on a fraud so severely punishable. ‘Suppose,’ I said, avoiding an answer, ‘as this note appoints an interview at three o’clock to-day at Seyton House, we meet him there, instead of your ladyship? A little talk with the fellow might be serviceable.’

Lady Seyton eagerly agreed to this proposal; and it was arranged that we should be at Seyton House half an hour before the appointed time, in readiness for the gentleman. Lady Seyton left in a hackney-coach, somewhat relieved, I thought, by having confided the oppressive secret to us, and with a nascent hope slightly flushing her pale, dejected countenance.

The firm of Flint and Sharp had then a long conference together, during which the lady's statement and Mr Chilton's documents were, the reader may be sure, very minutely conned over, analysed, and commented upon. Finally, it was resolved that if the approaching interview, the manner of which we agreed upon, did not prove satisfactory, Mr Flint should immediately proceed to Ireland, and personally ascertain the truth or falsehood of the facts alleged by Chilton.

'Mr Chilton is announced,' said Lady Seyton, hurriedly entering the library in Grosvenor Square, where Mr Flint and myself were seated. 'I need not be present, I think you said?' she added in great tremor.

'Certainly not, madam,' I replied. 'We shall do better alone.'

She retired instantly. Flint rose and stationed himself close by the door. Presently a sounding, confident step was heard along the passage, the library door swung back on its noiseless hinges, and in stalked a man of apparently about thirty-five years of age, tall, genteel, and soldier-looking. He started back on seeing me, recognising, I perceived, my vocation at a glance.

'How is this?' he exclaimed. 'I expected'——

'The Countess of Seyton. True; but her ladyship has deputed me to confer with you on the business mentioned in your note.'

'I shall have nothing to say to you,' he replied abruptly, and turned to leave the room. Mr Flint had shut the door, and was standing with his back to it.

'You can't go,' he said in his coolest manner. 'The police are within call.'

'The police! What do you mean?' cried Chilton angrily, but, spite of his assurance, visibly trembling beneath Flint's searching, half-sneering look.

‘Nothing very remarkable,’ replied that gentleman, ‘or unusual in our profession. Come, sit down; we are lawyers; you are a man of business, we know. I daresay we shall soon understand each other.’

Mr Chilton sat down, and moodily awaited what was next to come.

‘You are aware,’ said Mr Flint, ‘that you have rendered yourself liable to transportation?’

‘What!’ exclaimed Chilton, flushing crimson, and starting to his feet. ‘What!’

‘To transportation,’ continued my imperturbable partner, ‘for seven, ten, fourteen years, or for life, at the discretion of the judge; but considering the frequency of the crime of late, I should say there is a strong probability that *you* will be a *lifer*!’

‘What gibberish is this?’ exclaimed Chilton, frightened, but still fierce. ‘I can prove everything I have said. Mr Gosford, I tell you’——

‘Well, well,’ interrupted Mr Flint; ‘put it in what light you please; turn it which way you will; it’s like the key in Blue Beard, which I daresay you have read of; rub it out on one side, and up it comes on the other. Say, by way of argument, that you have *not* obtained money by unfounded threats—a crime which the law holds tantamount to highway robbery. You have in that case obtained money for compromising a felony—that of polygamy. An awful position, my good sir, choose which you will.’

Utterly chop-fallen was the lately triumphant man; but he speedily rallied.

‘I care not,’ he at length said. ‘Punish me you may; but the pride of this sham countess and the sham earl will be brought low. And I tell you once for all,’ he added, rising at the same time, and speaking in ringing wrathful

tones, 'that I defy you, and will either be handsomely remunerated for silence, or I will at once inform the Honourable James Kingston that he is the true Earl of Seyton.'

'And I tell *you*,' retorted Flint, 'that if you attempt to leave this room, I will give you into custody at once, and transport you, whatever may be the consequence to others. Come, come, let us have no more nonsense or bluster. We have strong reasons for believing that the story by which you have been extorting money is a fabrication. If it be so, rely upon it we shall detect and punish you. Your only safe course is to make a clean breast of it whilst there is yet time. Out with it, man, at once, and you shall go scot-free; nay, have a few score pounds more—say a hundred. Be wise in time, I counsel you.'

Chilton hesitated; his white lips quivered. 'There *was* something to reveal.

'I cannot,' he muttered after a considerable pause. 'There is nothing to disclose.'

'You will not! Then your fate be on your own head. I have done with you.'

It was now my turn. 'Come, come,' I said, 'it is useless urging this man further.—How much do you expect? The insolent proposal contained in your note is, you well know, out of the question. How much *money* do you expect for keeping this wretched affair secret? State your terms at once.'

'A thousand per annum,' was the reply, 'and the first year down.'

'Modest, upon my word! But I suppose we must comply.' I wrote out an agreement. 'Will you sign this?'

He ran it over. 'Yes. Lady Seyton, as she calls herself, will take care it never sees the light.'

I withdrew, and in two or three minutes returned with a cheque. 'Her ladyship has no present cash at the banker's,' I said, 'and is obliged to post-date this cheque twelve days.'

The rascal grumbled a good deal; but as there was no help for it he took the security, signed the agreement, and walked off.

'A sweet nut that for the Evil One to crack,' observed Mr Flint, looking savagely after him. 'I am in hopes we shall trounce him yet, bravely as he carries it. The cheque of course is not payable to order or bearer?'

'Certainly not; and before twelve days are past, you will have returned from Ireland. The agreement may be, I thought, of use with Cunningham or Mullins. If they have been conspiring together, they will scarcely admire the light in which you can place the arrangement, as affording proof that he means to keep the lion's share of the reward to himself.'

'Exactly. At all events we shall get at the truth, whatever it be.'

The same evening Mr Flint started for Dublin *via* Holyhead.

I received in due course a letter from him dated the day after his arrival there. It was anything but a satisfactory one. The date on the grave-stone had been truly represented, and Mullins who erected it was a highly respectable man. Flint had also seen the grave-digger, but could make nothing out of him. There was no regular register of deaths kept in Swords except that belonging to Cunningham; and the minister who buried Gosford, and who lived at that time in Dublin, had been dead some time. This was disheartening and melancholy enough; and, as if to give our unfortunate client the *coup-de-grâce*, Mr Jackson junior marched into the office just after I

had read it, to say that, having been referred by Lady Seyton to us for explanations with respect to a statement made by a Mr Edward Chilton to the Honourable James Kingston, for whom they, the Messrs Jackson, were now acting, by which it appeared that the said Honourable James Kingston was, in fact, the true Earl of Seyton, he, Mr Jackson junior, would be happy to hear what I had to say upon the subject! It needed but this. Chilton had, as I feared he would, after finding we had been consulted, sold his secret, doubtless advantageously, to the heir-at-law. There was still, however, a chance that something favourable might turn up, and as I had no notion of throwing that chance away, I carelessly replied that we had reason to believe Chilton's story was a malicious fabrication, and that we should of course throw on them the onus of judicial proof that Gosford was still alive when the late earl's marriage was solemnised. Finally, however, to please Mr Jackson, who professed to be very anxious, for the lady's sake, to avoid unnecessary éclat, and to arrange the affair as quietly as possible, I agreed to meet him at Lady Seyton's in four days from that time, and hear the evidence upon which he relied. This could not at all events render our position worse; and it was meanwhile agreed that the matter should be kept as far as possible profoundly secret.

Three days passed without any further tidings from Mr Flint, and I vehemently feared that his journey had proved a fruitless one, when, on the evening previous to the day appointed for the conference at Seyton House, a hackney-coach drove rapidly up to the office door, and out popped Mr Flint, followed by two strangers, whom he very watchfully escorted into the house. 'Mr Patrick Mullins and Mr Pierce Cunningham,' said Flint as he shook hands with me in a way which, in conjunction with the merry

sparkle of his eyes and the boisterous tone of his voice, assured me all was right. 'Mr Pierce Cunningham will sleep here to-night,' he added; 'so Collins had better engage a bed out.'

Cunningham, an ill-looking lout of a fellow, muttered that he chose to sleep at a tavern.

'Not if I know it, my fine fellow,' rejoined Mr Flint. 'You mean well, I daresay; but I cannot lose sight of you for all that. You either sleep here or at a station-house.'

The man stared with surprise and alarm; but knowing refusal or resistance to be hopeless, sullenly assented to the arrangement, and withdrew to the room appointed for him, vigilantly guarded. For Mr Mullins we engaged a bed at a neighbouring tavern.

Mr Flint's mission had been skilfully and successfully accomplished. He was convinced, by the sullen confusion of manner manifested by Cunningham, that some villainous agency had been at work, and he again waited on Mullins the stone-cutter. 'Who gave you the order for the gravestone?' he asked. Mr Mullins referred to his book, and answered that he received it by letter. 'Had he got that letter?' 'Very likely,' he replied, 'as he seldom destroyed business papers of any kind.' 'A search was instituted, and finally this letter,' said Mr Flint, 'worth an earl's coronet, torn and dirty as it is, turned up.' This invaluable document, which bore the London post-date of June 23, 1832, ran as follows:

'ANGLESEA HOTEL, HAYMARKET, LONDON, *June 23, 1832.*

'SIR—Please to erect a plain tombstone at the head of Charles Gosford, Esquire's grave, who died a few months since at Swords, aged thirty-two years. This is all that need be inscribed upon it. You are referred to Mr Guinness

of Sackville Street, Dublin, for payment.—Your obedient servant,
EDWARD CHILTON.'

'You see,' continued Flint, 'the fellow had inadvertently left out the date of Gosford's death, merely stating it occurred a few months previously ; and Mullins concluded that, in entering the order in his day-book, he must have somehow or other confounded the date of the letter with that of Gosford's decease. Armed with this precious discovery, I again sought Cunningham, and by dint of promises and threats, at last got the truth out of the rascal. It was this. Chilton, who returned to this country from the Cape, where he had resided for three years previously, about two months ago, having some business to settle in Dublin, went over there, and one day visited Swords, read the inscription on Charles Gosford's grave-stone, and immediately sought out the grave-digger, and asked him if he had any record of that gentleman's burial. Cunningham said he had, and produced his book, by which it appeared that it took place December 24, 1831. "That cannot be," remarked Chilton, and he referred to the head-stone. Cunningham said he had noticed the mistake a few days after it was erected ; but thinking it of no consequence, and never having, that he knew of, seen Mr Mullins since, he had said, and indeed thought, nothing about it. To conclude the story—Chilton ultimately, by payment of ten pounds down, and liberal promises for the future, prevailed upon the grave-digger to lend himself to the infamous device the sight of the grave-stone had suggested to his fertile, unscrupulous brain.'

This was indeed a glorious success, and the firm of Flint and Sharp drank the Countess of Seyton's health that evening with great enthusiasm, and gleefully 'thought of the morrow.'

We found the drawing-room of Seyton House occupied by the Honourable James Kingston, his solicitors the Messrs Jackson, Lady Seyton, and her father and sister, to whom she had at length disclosed the source of her disquietude. The children were leaving the apartment as we entered it, and the grief-dimmed eyes of the countess rested sadly upon her bright-eyed boy as he slowly withdrew with his sisters. That look changed to one of wild surprise as it encountered Mr Flint's shining, good-humoured countenance. I was more composed and reserved than my partner, though feeling as vividly as he did the satisfaction of being able not only to dispel Lady Seyton's anguish, but to extinguish the exultation, and trample on the hopes, of the Honourable James Kingston, a stiff, grave, middle-aged piece of hypocritical propriety, who was surveying from out the corners of his affectedly unobservant eyes the furniture and decorations of the splendid apartment, and hugging himself with the thought that all that was his! Business was immediately proceeded with. Chilton was called in. He repeated his former story *verbatim*, and with much fluency and confidence. He then placed in the hands of Jackson senior the vouchers signed by Cunningham and Mullins. The transient light faded from Lady Seyton's countenance as she turned despairingly, almost accusingly, towards us.

'What answer have you to make to this gentleman's statement, thus corroborated?' demanded Jackson senior.


'Quite a remarkable one,' replied Mr Flint, as he rang the bell. 'Desire the gentlemen in the library to step up,' he added to the footman who answered the summons. In about three minutes in marched Cunningham and Mullins, followed by two police-officers. An irrepressible exclamation of terror escaped Chilton, which was immediately echoed by Mr Flint's direction to the police, as he pointed

towards the trembling caitiff: 'That is your man: secure him.'

A storm of exclamations, questions, remonstrances, instantly broke forth, and it was several minutes before attention could be obtained for the statements of our two Irish witnesses and the reading of the happily found letter. The effect of the evidence adduced was decisive, electrical. Lady Seyton, as its full significance flashed upon her, screamed with convulsive joy, and I thought must have fainted from excess of emotion. The Reverend John Hayley returned audible thanks to God in a voice quivering with rapture, and Miss Hayley ran out of the apartment, and presently returned with the children, who were immediately half-smothered with their mother's ecstatic kisses. All was for a few minutes bewilderment, joy, rapture! Flint persisted to his dying day that Lady Seyton threw her arms round his neck and kissed his bald old forehead. This, however, I cannot personally vouch for, as my attention was engaged at the moment by the adverse claimant, the Honourable James Kingston, who exhibited one of the most irresistibly comic, woe-begone, lackadaisical aspects it is possible to conceive. He made a hurried and most undignified exit, and was immediately followed by the discomfited 'family' solicitors. Chilton was conveyed to a station-house, and the next day was fully committed for trial. He was convicted at the next sessions, and sentenced to seven years' transportation; and the 'celebrated' firm of Flint and Sharp derived considerable lustre and more profit from this successful stroke of professional dexterity.



JANE ECCLES.

 THE criminal business of the office was, during the first three or four years of our partnership, entirely superintended by Mr Flint; he being more *au fait*, from early practice, than myself in the art and mystery of prosecuting and defending felons, and I was thus happily relieved of duties which, in the days when George III. was king, were frequently very oppressive and revolting. The criminal practitioner dwelt in an atmosphere tainted alike with cruelty and crime, and pulsating alternately with merciless decrees of death and the shrieks and wailings of sentenced guilt. And not always guilt! There exist many records of proofs, incontestable, but obtained too late, of innocence having been legally strangled on the gallows in more than one or two solitary instances. How could it be otherwise with a criminal code crowded in every line with penalties of death, nothing but death? Juster, wiser times have dawned upon us, in which truer notions prevail of what man owes to man, even

when sitting in judgment on transgressors ; and this we owe, let us not forget, to the exertions of a band of men who, undeterred by the sneers of the reputedly wise and *practical* men of the world, and the taunts of 'influential' newspapers, persisted in teaching that the rights of property could be more firmly cemented than by the shedding of blood—law, justice, personal security more effectually vindicated than by the gallows. Let me confess that I also was, for many years, amongst the mockers, and sincerely held such 'theorists' and 'dreamers' as Sir Samuel Romilly and his fellow-workers in utter contempt. Not so my partner Mr Flint. Constantly in the presence of criminal judges and juries, he had less confidence in the unerring verity of their decisions than persons less familiar with them, or who see them only through the medium of newspapers. Nothing could exceed his distress of mind if, in cases in which he was prosecuting attorney, a convict died persisting in his innocence, or without a full confession of guilt. And to such a pitch did this morbidly sensitive feeling at length arrive, that he all at once refused to undertake, or in any way meddle with, criminal prosecutions, and they were consequently turned over to our head-clerk, with occasional assistance from me if there happened to be a press of business of the sort. Mr Flint still, however, retained a monopoly of the *defences*, except when, from some temporary cause or other, he happened to be otherwise engaged, when they fell to me. One of these I am about to relate, the result of which, whatever other impression it produced, thoroughly cured me—as it may the reader—of any propensity to sneer or laugh at criminal-law reformers and denouncers of the gallows.

One forenoon, during the absence of Mr Flint in Wiltshire, a Mrs Margaret Davies called at the office, in apparently great distress of mind. This lady, I must

premise, was an old, or at all events an elderly maiden of some four-and-forty years of age—I have heard a very intimate female friend of hers say she would never see fifty again, but this was spite—and possessed of considerable house-property in rather poor localities. She found abundant employment for energies which might otherwise have turned to cards and scandal, in collecting her weekly, monthly, and quarterly rents, and in promoting, or fancying she did, the religious and moral welfare of her tenants. Very barefaced, I well knew, were the impositions practised upon her credulous good-nature in money matters; and I strongly suspected the spiritual and moral promises and performances of her motley tenantry exhibited as much discrepancy as those pertaining to rent. Still, deceived or cheated as she might be, good Mrs Davies never wearied in what she conceived to be well-doing, and was ever ready to pour balm and oil into the wounds of the sufferer, however self-inflicted or deserved.

‘What is the matter now?’ I asked as soon as the good lady was seated, and had untied and loosened her bonnet, and thrown back her shawl, fast walking having heated her prodigiously. ‘Nothing worse than transportation is, I hope, likely to befall any of those interesting clients of yours.’

‘You are a hard-hearted man, Mr Sharp,’ replied Mrs Davies between a smile and a cry; ‘but being a lawyer, that is of course natural, and, as I am not here to consult you as a Christian, of no consequence.’

‘Complimentary, Mrs Davies; but pray go on.’

‘You know Jane Eccles, one of my tenants in Bank Buildings: the embroidress who adopted her sister’s orphan child?’

‘I remember her name. She obtained, if I recollect rightly, a balance of wages for her, due to the child’s

father, a mate, who died at sea. Well, what has befallen her ?'

'A terrible accusation has been preferred against her,' rejoined Mrs Davies; 'but as for a moment believing it, that is quite out of the question. Jane Eccles,' continued the warm-hearted lady, at the same time extracting a crumpled newspaper from the miscellaneous contents of her reticule—'Jane Eccles works hard from morning till night, keeps herself to herself; her little nephew and her rooms are always as clean and nice as a new pin; she attends church regularly; and pays her rent punctually to the day. This disgraceful story, therefore,' she added, placing the journal in my hands, '*cannot* be true.'

I glanced over the police news. 'Uttering forged Bank of England notes, knowing them to be forged,' I exclaimed. 'The devil !'

'There's no occasion to be spurting that name out so loudly, Mr Sharp,' said Mrs Davies with some asperity, 'especially in a lawyer's office. People have been wrongfully accused before to-day, I suppose ?'

I was intent on the report, and not answering, she continued: 'I heard nothing of it till I read the shameful account in the paper half-an-hour ago. The poor slandered girl was, I daresay, afraid or ashamed to send for me.'

'This appears to be a very bad case, Mrs Davies,' I said at length. 'Three forged ten-pound notes changed in one day at different shops each time under the pretence of purchasing articles of small amount, and another ten-pound note found in her pocket ! All that has, I must say, a very ugly look.'

'I don't care,' exclaimed Mrs Davies quite fiercely, 'if it looks as ugly as sin, or if the whole Bank of England was found in her pocket ! I know Jane Eccles well : she nursed

me last spring through the fever ; and I would be upon my oath that the whole story from beginning to end is an invention of the Evil One, or something worse.'

'Jane Eccles,' I persisted, 'appears to have been unable or unwilling to give the slightest explanation as to how she became possessed of the spurious notes. Who is this brother of hers, "of such highly respectable appearance," according to the report, who was permitted a private interview with her previous to the examination?'

'She has no brother that I have ever heard of,' said Mrs Davies. 'It must be a mistake of the papers.'

'That is not likely. You observed of course that she was fully committed—and no wonder!'

Mrs Davies's faith in the young woman's integrity was not to be shaken by any evidence save that of her own bodily eyes, and I agreed to see Jane Eccles on the morrow, and make the best arrangements for the defence—at Mrs Davies's charge—which the circumstances and the short time I should have for preparation—the Old Bailey session would be on in a few days—permitted. The matter so far settled, Mrs Margaret hurried off to see what had become of little Henry, the prisoner's nephew.

I visited Jane Eccles the next day in Newgate. She was a well-grown young woman of about two or three and twenty—not exactly pretty perhaps, but very well looking. Her brown hair was plainly worn, without a cap, and the expression of her face was, I thought, one of sweetness and humility, contradicted in some degree by rather harsh lines about the mouth, denoting strong will and purpose. As a proof of the existence of this last characteristic, I may here mention that when her first overweening confidence had yielded to doubt, she, although dotingly fond of her nephew, at this time about eight years of age, firmly refused to see him, 'in order,' she once said to me—and the thought brought a

deadly pallor to her face—‘in order that, should the worst befall, her memory might not be involuntarily connected in his mind with images of dungeons, and disgrace, and shame.’ Jane Eccles had received what is called in the country ‘a good schooling,’ and the books Mrs Davies had lent her she had eagerly perused. She was therefore to a certain extent a cultivated person ; and her speech and manners were mild, gentle, and, so to speak, religious. I generally found, when I visited her, a Bible or Prayer-book in her hand. This, however, from my experience, comparatively slight though it was, did not much impress me in her favour—devotional sentiment so easily, for a brief time, assumed being in nine such cases out of ten a hypocritical deceit. Still she, upon the whole, made a decidedly favourable impression on me, and I no longer so much wondered at the bigotry of unbelief manifested by Mrs Davies in behalf of her apparently amiable and grateful protégée.

But beyond the moral doubt thus suggested of the prisoner’s guilt, my interviews with her utterly failed to extract anything from her in rebutment of the charge upon which she was about to be arraigned. At first she persisted in asserting that the prosecution was based upon manifest error ; that the impounded notes, instead of being forged, were genuine Bank of England paper. It was some time before I succeeded in convincing her that this hope, to which she so eagerly, desperately clung, was a fallacious one. I did so at last. ‘And either,’ thought I, as I marked her varying colour and faltering voice, ‘either you are a consummate actress, or else the victim of some frightful delusion or conspiracy.’

‘I will see you, if you please, to-morrow,’ she said, looking up from the chair upon which, with her head bowed and her face covered with her hands, she had been seated for several minutes in silence. ‘My thoughts are confused

now, but to-morrow I shall be more composed ; better able to decide if—— to talk, I mean, of this unhappy business.'

I thought it better to comply without remonstrance, and at once took my leave.

When I returned the next afternoon, the governor of the prison informed me that the brother of my client, James Eccles, quite a dashing gentleman, had had a long interview with her. He had left about two hours before, with the intention, he said, of calling upon me.

I was conducted to the room where my conferences with the prisoner usually took place. In a few minutes she appeared, much flushed and excited, it seemed to be alternately with trembling joy and hope, and doubt and nervous fear.

'Well,' I said, 'I trust you are now ready to give me your unreserved confidence, without which, be assured that any reasonable hope of a successful issue from the peril in which you are involved is out of the question.'

The varying emotions I have noticed were clearly traceable as they swept over her tell-tale countenance during the minute or so that elapsed before she spoke.

'Tell me candidly, sir,' she said at last, 'if I owned to you that the notes were given to me by a—a person whom I cannot, if I would, produce, to purchase various articles at different shops, and return him—the person I mean—the change ; and that I made oath this was done by me in all innocence of heart, as the God of heaven and earth truly knows it was—whether it would avail me?'

'Not in the least,' I replied, angry at such trifling. 'How can you ask such a question? We must *find* the person who, you intimate, has deceived you and placed your life in peril ; and if that can be proved, hang him instead of you.—I speak plainly, Miss Eccles,' I added in a milder tone ; 'perhaps you may think unfeelingly, but there is no

further time for playing with this dangerous matter. To-morrow a true bill will be found against you, and your trial may then come on immediately. If you are careless for yourself, you ought to have some thought for the sufferings of your excellent friend Mrs Davies ; for your nephew, soon perhaps to be left friendless and destitute.'

'Oh, spare me—spare me!' sobbed the unhappy young woman, sinking nervelessly into a seat. 'Have pity upon me, wretched, bewildered as I am!' Tears relieved her, and after a while she said: 'It is useless, sir, to prolong this interview. I could not, I solemnly assure you, if I would, tell you where to search for or find the person of whom I spoke. And,' she added, whilst the lines about her mouth of which I have spoken grew distinct and rigid, 'I would not if I could. What indeed would it avail, as I have been told and believe, but to cause the death of two deceived innocent persons instead of one? Besides,' she continued, trying to speak with firmness, and repress the shudder which crept over and shook her as with ague—'besides, whatever the verdict, the penalty will not, cannot, I am sure, I know, be—be'——

I understood her plainly enough, although her resolution failed to sustain her through the sentence.

'Who is this brother—James Eccles he calls himself—whom you saw at the police-office, and who has twice been here, I understand—once to-day?'

A quick start revealed the emotion with which she heard the question, and her dilated eyes rested upon me for a moment with eager scrutiny. She speedily recovered her presence of mind, and with her eyes again fixed on the floor, said in a quivering voice: 'My brother! Yes—as you say—my brother.'

'Mrs Davies says you have no brother!' I sharply rejoined.

‘Good Mrs Davies,’ she replied in a tone scarcely above a whisper, and without raising her head, ‘does not know all our family.’

A subterfuge was, I was confident, concealed in these words ; but after again and again urging her to confide in me, and finding warning and persuasion alike useless, I withdrew discomfited and angry ; and withal as much concerned and grieved as baffled and indignant. On going out, I arranged with the governor that the ‘brother,’ if he again made his appearance, should be detained, *bon gré mal gré*, till my arrival. Our precaution was too late : he did not reappear ; and so little notice had any one taken of his person, that to advertise a description of him with a reward for his apprehension was hopeless.

A true bill was found, and two hours afterwards Jane Eccles was placed in the dock. The trial did not last more than twenty minutes, at the end of which, an unhesitating verdict of guilty was returned, and she was duly sentenced to be hanged by the neck till she was dead. We had retained the ablest counsel practising in the court, but, with no tangible defence, their efforts were merely thrown away. Upon being asked what she had to say why the sentence of the law should not be carried into effect, she repeated her previous statement—that the notes had been given her to change by a person in whom she reposed the utmost confidence ; and that she had not the slightest thought of evil or fraud in what she did. That person, however, she repeated once more, could not be produced. Her assertions only excited a derisive smile ; and all necessary forms having been gone through, she was removed from the bar.

The unhappy woman bore the ordeal through which she had just passed with much firmness. Once only, whilst sentence was being passed, her high-strung resolution appeared to falter and give way. I was watching her

intently, and I observed that she suddenly directed a piercing look towards a distant part of the crowded court. In a moment her eye lightened, the expression of extreme horror which had momentarily darkened her countenance passed away, and her partial composure returned. I had instinctively, as it were, followed her glance, and thought I detected a tall man enveloped in a cloak engaged in dumb momentary communication with her. I jumped up from my seat, and hastened as quickly as I could through the thronged passages to the spot, and looked eagerly around; but the man, whoever he might be, was gone.

The next act in this sad drama was the decision of the Privy Council upon the recorder's report. It came. Several were reprieved, but amongst them was *not* Jane Eccles. She and nine others were to perish at eight o'clock on the following morning.

The anxiety and worry inseparable from this most unhappy affair, which, from Mr Flint's protracted absence, I had exclusively to bear, fairly knocked me up, and on the evening of the day on which the decision of the Council was received, I went to bed much earlier than usual, and really ill. Sleep I could not, and I was tossing restlessly about, vainly endeavouring to banish from my mind the gloomy and terrible images connected with the wretched girl and her swiftly coming fate, when a quick tap sounded on the door, and a servant's voice announced that one of the clerks had brought a letter which the superscription directed to be read without a moment's delay. I sprang out of bed, snatched the letter, and eagerly ran it over. It was from the Newgate chaplain, a very worthy humane gentleman, and stated that, on hearing the result of the deliberations of the Privy Council, all the previous stoicism and fortitude exhibited by Jane Eccles had completely given way, and she had abandoned herself to the wildest terror and despair.

As soon as she could speak coherently, she implored the governor with frantic earnestness to send for me. As this was not only quite useless in the opinion of that official, but against the rules, the prisoner's request was not complied with. The chaplain, however, thinking it might be as well that I should know of her desire to see me, had of his own accord sent me this note. He thought that possibly the sheriffs would permit me to have a brief interview with the condemned prisoner in the morning, if I arrived sufficiently early ; and although it could avail nothing as regarded her fate in this world, still it might perhaps calm the frightful tumult of emotion by which she was at present tossed and shaken, and enable her to meet the inevitable hour with fortitude and resignation.

It was useless to return to bed after receiving such a communication, and I forthwith dressed myself, determined to sit up and read, if I could, till the hour should strike at which I might hope to be admitted to the jail. Slowly and heavily the dark night limped away, and as the first rays of the cold wintry dawn reached the earth, I sallied forth. A dense, brutal crowd were already assembled in front of the prison, and hundreds of well-dressed sight-seers occupied the opposite windows, morbidly eager for the rising of the curtain upon the mournful tragedy about to be enacted. I obtained admission without much difficulty, but, till the arrival of the sheriffs, no conference with the condemned prisoners could be possibly permitted. Those important functionaries happened on this morning to arrive unusually late, and I paced up and down the paved corridor in a fever of impatience and anxiety. They were at last announced ; but before I could, in the hurry and confusion, obtain speech of either of them, the dismal bell tolled out, and I felt with a shudder that it was no longer possible to effect my object. ' Perhaps it is better so,' observed the reverend

chaplain in a whisper. 'She has been more composed for the last two or three hours, and is now, I trust, in a better frame of mind for death.' I turned, sick at heart, to leave the place, and in my agitation missing the right way, came directly in view of the terrible procession. Jane Eccles saw me, and a terrific scream, followed by frantic heart-rending appeals to me to save her, burst with convulsive effort from her white quivering lips. Never will the horror of that moment pass from my remembrance. I staggered back, as if every spasmodic word struck me like a blow; and then, directed by one of the turnkeys, sped in an opposite direction as fast as my trembling limbs could carry me—the shrieks of the wretched victim, the tolling of the dreadful bell, and the obscene jeers and mocks of the foul crowd through which I had to force my way, evoking a confused tumult of disgust and horror in my brain, which, if long continued, would have driven me mad. On reaching home, I was bled freely, and got to bed. This treatment, I have no doubt prevented a violent access of fever; for, as it was, several days passed before I could be safely permitted to re-engage in business.

On revisiting the office, a fragment of a letter written by Jane Eccles a few hours previous to her death, and evidently addressed to Mrs Davies, was placed before me by Mr Flint, who had by this time returned. The following is an exact copy of it, with the exception that the intervals which I have marked with dots . . . were filled with erasures and blots, and that every word seemed to have been traced by a hand smitten with palsy :

‘FROM MY DEATH-PLACE, *Midnight*.

‘DEAR MADAM—No, beloved friend, mother let me call you O kind, gentle mother, I am to die to be killed in a few hours by cruel men !—I, so young, so unprepared for death, and yet guiltless ! Oh, never doubt

that I am guiltless of the offence for which they will have the heart to hang me. . . . Nobody, they say, can save me now; yet if I could see the lawyer I have been deceived, cruelly deceived, madam—buoyed up by lying hopes, till just now the thunder burst, and I—O God! As they spoke, the fearful chapter in the Testament came bodily before me—the rending of the vail in twain, the terrible darkness, and the opened graves! I did not write for this, but my brain aches and dazzles It is too late—too late, they all tell me! Ah, if these dreadful laws were not so swift, I might yet—but no; *he* clearly proved to me how useless I must not think of that It is of my nephew, of your Henry, child of my affections, that I would speak. Oh, would that I But hark! they are coming The day has dawned to me the day of judgment!’

This incoherent scrawl only confirmed my previous suspicions; but it was useless to dwell further on the melancholy subject. The great axe had fallen, and whether justly or unjustly, would, I feared, as in many, very many other cases, never be clearly ascertained in this world. I was mistaken. Another case of ‘uttering forged Bank of England notes, knowing them to be forged,’ which came under our cognisance a few months afterwards, revived the fading memory of Jane Eccles’s early doom, and cleared up every obscurity connected with it.

The offender in this new case was a tall dark-complexioned, handsome man, of about thirty years of age, of the name of Justin Arnold. His lady-mother, whose real name I shall conceal under that of Barton, retained us for her son’s defence, and from her and other sources we learned the following particulars.

Justin Arnold was the lady’s son by a former marriage.

Mrs Barton, a still splendid woman, had, in second nuptials, espoused a very wealthy person, and from time to time had covertly supplied Justin Arnold's extravagance. This, however, from the wild course the young man pursued, could not be for ever continued, and after many warnings, the supplies were stopped. Incapable of reformation, Justin Arnold, in order to obtain the means of dissipation, connected himself with a cleverly organised band of swindlers and forgers, who so adroitly managed their nefarious business, that, till his capture, they had contrived to keep themselves clear of the law—the inferior tools and dupes having been alone caught in its fatal meshes. The defence, under these circumstances necessarily a difficult, almost impossible one, was undertaken by Mr Flint, and conducted by him with his accustomed skill and energy.

I took a very slight interest in the matter, and heard little concerning it till its judicial conclusion by the conviction of the offender, and his condemnation to death. The decision on the recorder's report was this time communicated to the authorities of Newgate on a Saturday, so that the batch ordered for execution, amongst whom was Justin Arnold, would not be hanged till the Monday morning. Rather late in the evening a note once more reached me from the chaplain of the prison. Justin Arnold wished to see me—*me*, not Mr Flint. He had something of importance to communicate, he said, relative to a person in whom I had once felt great interest. It flashed across me that this Justin might be the 'brother' of Jane Eccles, and I determined to see him. I immediately sought out one of the sheriffs, and obtained an order empowering me to see the prisoner on the afternoon of the morrow (Sunday).

I found that the convict had expressed great anxiety lest I should decline to see him. My hoped-for visit was the only matter which appeared to occupy the mind or excite

the care of the mocking, desperate young man ; even the early and shameful termination of his own life on the morrow he seemed to be utterly reckless of. Thus prepared, I was the less surprised at the scene which awaited me in the prisoner's cell, where I found him in angry altercation with the pale affrighted chaplain.

I had never seen Justin Arnold before ; this I was convinced of the instant I saw him ; but he knew, and greeted me instantly by name. His swarthy, excited features were flushed and angry, and after briefly thanking me for complying with his wishes, he added in a violent, rapid tone : ' This good man has been teasing me. He says, and truly, that I have defied God by my life ; and now he wishes me to mock that inscrutable Being, on the eve of death, by words without sense, meaning, or truth ! '

' No, no, no ! ' ejaculated the reverend gentleman. ' I exhorted you to true repentance, to peace, charity, to '—

' True repentance, peace, charity ! ' broke in the prisoner with a scornful burst : ' when my heart is full of rage, and bitterness, and despair ! Give me *time* for this repentance which you say is so needful—time to lure back long since banished hope, and peace, and faith ! Pooh !—you but flout me with words without meaning. I am unfit, you say, for the presence of men, but quite fit for that of God, before whom you are about to arrogantly cast me ! Be it so : my deeds upon my head ! It is at least not my fault that I am hurled to judgment before the Eternal Judge himself commanded my presence there ! '

' He may be unworthy to live,' murmured the scared chaplain, ' but oh, how utterly unfit to die ! '

' That is true,' rejoined Justin Arnold with undiminished vehemence. ' Those, if you will, are words of truth and sense : go you and preach them to the makers and execu-

tioners of English law. In the meantime I would speak privately with this gentleman.'

The reverend pastor, with a mute gesture of compassion, sorrow, and regret, was about to leave the cell, when he was stayed by the prisoner, who exclaimed: 'Now I think of it, sir, you had better remain. The statement I am about to make cannot, for the sake of the victim's reputation and for her friends' sake, have too many witnesses. You both remember Jane Eccles?' A broken exclamation from both of us answered him, and he quickly added: 'Ah, you already guess the truth, I see. Well, I do not wonder you should start and turn pale. It *was* a cruel, shameless deed—a dastardly murder, if there was ever one. In as few words as possible, so you interrupt me not, I will relate *my* share in the atrocious business.' He spoke rapidly, and once or twice during the brief recital the moistened eye and husky voice betrayed emotions which his pride would have concealed.

'Jane and I were born in Hertfordshire, within a short distance of each other. I knew her from a child. She was better off then, I worse than we subsequently became—she by her father's bankruptcy, I by my mo——, by Mrs Barton's wealthy marriage. She was about nineteen, I twenty-four, when I left the country for London. That she loved me with all the fervour of a trusting woman, I well knew; and I had, too, for some time known that she must be either honourably wooed or not at all. That with me was out of the question, and, as I told you, I came about that time to London. You can, I daresay, imagine the rest. We were—I mean my friends and I—at a loss for agents to dispose of our wares, and at the same time pressed for money. I met Jane Eccles by accident. Genteel, of graceful address and winning manners, she was just fitted for our purpose. I feigned reawakened love,

proffered marriage and a home across the Atlantic as soon as certain trifling but troublesome affairs which momentarily harassed me were arranged. She believed me. I got her to change a considerable number of notes under various pretexts; but that they were forged she had not and could not have the remotest suspicion. You know the catastrophe. After her apprehension I visited this prison as her brother, and buoyed her up to the last with illusions of certain pardon and release, whatever the verdict, through the influence of my wealthy father-in-law, of our immediate union afterwards, and tranquil American home. It is needless to say more. She trusted me, and I sacrificed her. Less flagrant instances of a like nature occur every day. And now, gentlemen, I would fain be alone.'

'Remorseless villain!' I could not help exclaiming under my breath as he moved away.

He turned quickly back, and looking me in the face, without the slightest anger, said: 'An execrable villain, if you like—not a remorseless one! Her death alone sits near, and troubles my to all else hardened conscience.—And let me tell you, reverend sir,' he continued, resuming his former bitterness as he addressed the chaplain—'let me tell you that it was not the solemn words of the judge the other day, but her pale, reproachful image, standing suddenly beside me in the dock, just as she looked when I passed my last deception on her, that caused the tremor and affright, complacently attributed by that grave functionary to his own sepulchral eloquence. After all, her death cannot be exclusively laid to my charge. Those who tried her would not believe her story, and yet it was true as death. Had they not been so confident in their own unerring wisdom, they might have doomed her to some punishment short of the scaffold, and could now have retrieved their error. But I am weary, and would, I repeat,

be alone. Farewell!' He threw himself on the rude pallet, and we silently withdrew.

A paper embodying Justin Arnold's declaration was forwarded to the Secretary of State, and duly acknowledged, accompanied by an official expression of mild regret that it had not been made in time to save the life of Jane Eccles. No further notice was taken of the matter; and the record of the young woman's judicial sacrifice still doubtless encumbers the archives of the Home Office, forming, with numerous others of like character, the dark, sanguine background upon which stand out in bright relief and changeless lustre the achievements of the great and good men who have so successfully purged the old Draco code, that now a faint vestige only of the old barbarism remains.



‘EVERY MAN HIS OWN LAWYER.’

A SMARTER trader, a keener appreciator of the tendencies to a rise or fall in colonial produce —sugars more especially—than John Linden, of Mincing Lane, it would have been difficult to point out in the wide city of London. He was not so immensely rich as many others engaged in the same merchant-traffic as himself; nothing at all like it indeed, for I doubt that he could at any time have been esteemed worth more than from eighty to ninety thousand pounds; but his transactions, although limited in extent when compared with those of the mammoth colonial houses, almost always returned more or less of profit; the result of his remarkable keenness and sagacity in scenting hurricanes, black insurrections, and emancipation bills, whilst yet inappreciable, or deemed afar off, by less sensitive organisations. At least to this wonderful prescience of future sugar-value did Mr Linden himself attribute his rise in the world, and gradual increase in rotundity, riches, and

respectability. This constant success engendered, as it is too apt to do, inordinate egotism, conceit, self-esteem, vanity. There was scarcely a social, governmental, or economical problem which he did not believe himself capable of solving as easily as he could eat his dinner when hungry. Common-sense business habits—his favourite phrase—he believed to be quite sufficient for the elucidation of the most difficult question in law, physic, or divinity. The science of law especially he held to be an alphabet which any man—of common-sense and business habits—could as easily master as he could count five on his fingers; and there was no end to his ridicule of the men with horse-hair head-dresses, and their quirks, quiddits, cases, tenures, and such-like language. Lawyers, according to him, were a set of thorough humbugs and impostors, who gained their living by false pretence—that of affording advice and counsel, which every sane man could better render himself. He was unmistakably mad upon this subject, and he carried his insane theory into practice. He drew his own leases, examined the titles of some house-property he purchased, and set his hand and seal to the final deeds, guided only by his own common-sense spectacles. Once he bid, at the auction mart, as high as fifty-three thousand pounds for the Holmford estate, Herefordshire; and had he not been outbidden by young Palliser, son of the then recently deceased eminent distiller, who was eager to obtain the property, with a view to a seat in parliament which its possession was said to almost insure—he would, I had not at the time the slightest doubt, have completed the purchase, without for a moment dreaming of submitting the vender's title to the scrutiny of a professional adviser. Mr Linden, I should mention, had been for some time desirous of resigning his business in Mincing Lane to his son, Thomas Linden, the only child born to him by his long-since-deceased wife, and of retiring, an

estimated squirearch, to the *otium cum* or *sine dignitate*, as the case might be, of a country life; and this disposition had of late been much quickened by daily increasing apprehensions of negro emancipation and revolutionary interference with differential duties—changes which, in conjunction with others of similar character, would infallibly bring about that utter commercial ruin which Mr Linden, like every other rich and about-to-retire merchant or tradesman whom I have ever known, constantly prophesied to be near at hand and inevitable.

With such a gentleman the firm of Flint and Sharp had only professional interviews, when procrastinating or doubtful debtors required that he should put on the screw—a process which I have no doubt he would himself have confidently performed, but for the waste of valuable time which doing so would necessarily involve. Both Flint and myself were, however, privately intimate with him—Flint more especially, who had known him from boyhood—and we frequently dined with him on a Sunday at his little box at Fulham. Latterly, we had on these occasions met there a Mrs Arnold and her daughter Catherine—an apparently amiable, and certainly very pretty and interesting young person, to whom, Mr Linden confidentially informed us, his son Tom had been for some time engaged.

‘I don’t know much about her family,’ observed Mr Linden one day, in the course of a gossip at the office, ‘but she moves in very respectable society. Tom met her at the Slades’; but I *do* know she has something like thirty-five thousand pounds in the funds. The instant I was informed how matters stood with the young folks, I, as a matter of common-sense and business, asked the mother, Mrs Arnold, for a reference to her banker or solicitor—there being no doubt that a woman and a minor would be in lawyers’ leading-strings—and she referred

me to Messrs Dobson of Chancery Lane. You know the Dobsons?’

‘Perfectly. What was the reply?’

‘That Catherine Arnold, when she came of age—it wants but a very short time of that now—would be entitled to the capital of thirty-four thousand seven hundred pounds, bequeathed by an uncle, and now lodged in the funds in the names of the trustees, Crowther and Jenkins of Leadenhall Street, by whom the interest on that sum was regularly paid, half-yearly, through the Messrs Dobson, for the maintenance and education of the heiress. A common-sense, business-like letter in every respect, and extremely satisfactory; and as soon as he pleases, after Catherine Arnold comes of age and in actual possession of her fortune, Tom may have her, with my blessing over the bargain.’

I dined at Laurel Villa, Fulham, about two months after this conversation, and Linden and I found ourselves alone over the dessert—the young people having gone out for a stroll, attracted doubtless by the gay aspect of the Thames, which flows past the miniature grounds attached to the villa. Never had I seen Mr Linden in so gay, so mirthful a mood.

‘Pass the decanter,’ he exclaimed the instant the door had closed upon Tom and his *fiancée*—‘pass the decanter, Sharp; I have news for you, my boy, now they are gone.’

‘Indeed. And what may the news be?’

‘Fill a bumper for yourself, and I’ll give you a toast. Here’s to the health and prosperity of the proprietor of the Holmford estate; and may he live a thousand years, and one over!—Hip, hip, hurrah!’

He swallowed his glass of wine, and then, in his intensity of glee, laughed himself purple.

‘You needn’t stare so,’ he said, as soon as he had

partially recovered breath. 'I am the proprietor of the Holmford property—bought it for fifty-six thousand pounds of that young scant-grace and spendthrift, Palliser—fifteen thousand pounds less than what it cost him, with the outlay he has made upon it. Signed, sealed, delivered, paid for yesterday. Ha! ha! ho! Leave John Linden alone for a bargain! It's worth seventy thousand pounds, if it's worth a shilling. I say,' continued he, after a renewed spasm of exuberant mirth, 'not a word about it to anybody—mind! I promised Palliser, who is quietly packing up to be off to Italy, or Australia, or Constantinople—all of them, perhaps, in succession—not to mention a word about it till he was well off—you understand? Ha! ha!—ho! ho!' again burst out Mr Linden. 'I pity the poor creditors though! Bless you! I shouldn't have had it at anything like the price, only for his knowing that I was not likely to be running about exposing the affair, by asking lawyers whether an estate in a family's possession, as this was in Dursley's for three hundred years, had a good title or not. So be careful not to drop a word, even to Tom—for my honour's sake. A delicious bargain, and no mistake! Worth, if a penny, seventy thousand pounds. Ha! ha!—ho! ho!'

'Then you have really parted with that enormous sum of money without having had the title to the estate professionally examined?'

'Title! Fiddlestick! I looked over the deeds myself. Besides, haven't I told you the ancestors of Dursley, from whose executors Palliser purchased the estate, were in possession of it for centuries. What better title than prescription can there be?'

'That may be true enough; but still'—

'I ought, you think, to have risked losing the bargain by delay, and have squandered time and money upon

fellows in horse-hair wigs, in order to ascertain what I sufficiently well knew already? Pooh! I am not in my second childhood yet!

It was useless to argue with him; besides the mischief, if mischief there was, had been done; and the not long delayed entrance of the young couple necessitating a change of topic, I innocently inquired what he thought of the Negro Emancipation Bill which Mr Stanley, as the organ of the ministry, had introduced a few evenings previously, and was rewarded by a perfect deluge of loquacious indignation and invective, during a pause in which hurly-burly of angry words I contrived to effect my escape.

‘Crowther and Jenkins!’ exclaimed Mr Flint one morning, looking up from the *Times* newspaper he held in his hand—‘Crowther and Jenkins! What is it we know about Crowther and Jenkins?’

The question was addressed to me, and I, like my partner, could not at the moment precisely recall why those names sounded upon our ears with a certain degree of interest as well as familiarity. ‘Crowther and Jenkins!’ I echoed. ‘True: what *do* we know about Crowther and Jenkins? Oh, I have it!—they are the executors of a will under which young Linden’s pretty bride, that is to be, inherits her fortune.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Mr Flint, as he put down the paper, and looked me gravely in the face—‘I remember now. Their names are in the list of bankrupts. A failure in the gambling corn-trade too. I hope they have not been speculating with the young woman’s money.’

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Mr Linden was announced, and presently in walked that gentleman in a state of considerable excitement.

‘I told you,’ he began, ‘some time ago about Crowther

and Jenkins being the persons in whose names Catherine Arnold’s money stood in the funds?’

‘Yes,’ replied Flint; ‘and I see by the *Gazette* they are bankrupts, and, by your face, that they have speculated with your intended daughter-in-law’s money, and lost it!’

‘Positively so!’ rejoined Mr Linden with great heat. ‘Drew it out many months ago! But they have exceedingly wealthy connections—at least Crowther has—who will, I suppose, arrange Miss Arnold’s claim rather than their relative should be arraigned for felony.’

‘Felony!—you are mistaken, my good sir. There is no felony—no *legal* felony, I mean—in the matter. Miss Arnold can only prove against the estate like any other creditor.’

‘She can’t? Tom, then, must look out for another wife, for I am credibly informed there won’t be a shilling in the pound.’

And so it turned out. The great corn-firm had been insolvent for years; and after speculating desperately and to a frightful extent, with a view to recover themselves, had failed to an enormous amount—their assets, comparatively speaking, proving to be *nil*.

The ruin spread around was terrible, chiefly on account of the vast quantity of accommodation paper they had afloat; but upon no one did the blow fall with greater severity than on young Linden and his promised wife. His father ordered him to instantly break off all acquaintance with Miss Arnold; and on the son, who was deeply attached to her, peremptorily refusing to do so, Linden senior threatened to turn him out of doors and ultimately disinherit him. Angry, indignant, and in love, Thomas Linden did a very rash and foolish thing: he persuaded Catherine Arnold to consent to a private marriage, arguing

that if the indissoluble knot were once fairly tied, his father would, as a matter of course—he being an only child—become reconciled to what he could no longer hope to prevent or remedy.

The imprudent young man deceived both himself and her who trusted in his pleasing plausibilities. Ten minutes after he had disclosed the marriage to his father, he was turned, almost penniless, out of doors; and the exasperated and inexorable old man refused to listen to any representation in his favour, by whomsoever proffered, and finally, even to permit the mention of his name in his hearing.

‘It’s of no use,’ said Mr Flint, on returning for the last time from a mission undertaken to extort, if possible, some provision against absolute starvation for the newly wedded couple. ‘He is as cold and hard as adamant, and I think, if possible, even more of a tiger than before. He will be here presently to give instructions for his will.’

‘His will! Surely he will draw that up himself after his own common-sense business fashion?’

‘He would unquestionably have done so a short time since; but some events that have lately occurred have considerably shaken his estimate of his own infallibility, and he is, moreover, determined, he says, that there shall be no mistake as to effectually disinheriting his son. He has made two or three heavy losses, and his mind is altogether in a very cankered, distempered state.’

Mr Linden called, as he had promised to do, and gave us the written heads of a will which he desired to have at once formally drawn up. By this instrument he devised the Holmford estate, and all other property, real and personal, of which he might die possessed, to certain charitable institutions, in varying proportions, payable as soon after his death as the property could be turned into money. ‘The statute of mortmain does not give me much

uneasiness,' remarked the vindictive old man with a bitter smile. 'I shall last some time yet. I would have left it all to you, Flint,' he added, 'only that I knew you would defeat my purpose by giving it back to that disobedient, ungrateful, worthless boy.'

'Do leave it to me,' rejoined Mr Flint with grave emphasis, 'and I promise you faithfully this—that the wish respecting it, whatever it may be, which trembles on your lip as you are about to leave this world for another, and when it may be too late to formally revoke the testament you now propose, shall be strictly carried out. That time cannot be a very distant one, John Linden, for a man whose hair is white as yours.'

It was preaching to the winds. He was deaf, blind, mute to every attempt at changing his resolve. The will was drawn in accordance with his peremptorily iterated instructions, and duly signed, sealed, and attested. Not very long afterwards, Mr Linden disposed of his business in Mincing Lane, and retired to Holmford, but with nothing like the money-fortune he had once calculated upon; the losses alluded to by Mr Flint, and followed by others, having considerably diminished his wealth.

We ultimately obtained a respectable and remunerative situation for Thomas Linden in a mercantile house at Belfast with which we were professionally acquainted; and after securing berths in the *Erin* steamer, he, with his wife and mother-in-law, came, with a kind of hopeful sadness in their looks and voices, to bid us farewell—for a very long time they and we also feared.

For an eternity, it seemed, on reading, a few days afterwards, the account of the loss of the *Erin*, with every soul on board! Their names were published with those of the other passengers who had embarked, and we had of course concluded that they had perished, when a letter reached us

from Belfast, stating that through some delay on the part of Mrs Arnold, they had happily lost their passage in the *Erin*, and embarked in the next steamer for Belfast, where they arrived in perfect safety. We forwarded this intelligence to Holmford, but it elicited no reply.

We heard nothing of Mr Linden for about two months, except by occasional notices in the *Hereford Times*, which he regularly forwarded to the office, relative to the improvements on the Holmford estate, either actually begun or contemplated by its new proprietor. He very suddenly reappeared. I was cooling my heels in the waiting-room of the chambers of the Barons of the Exchequer, Chancery Lane, awaiting my turn of admission, when one of our clerks came in half-breathless with haste. 'You are wanted, sir, immediately; Mr Flint is out, and Mr Linden is at the office raving like a madman.' I instantly transferred to the clerk the business I was in attendance at chambers upon, and with the help of a cab soon reached home.

Mr Linden was not *raging* when I arrived. The violence of the paroxysm of rage and terror by which he was possessed had passed away, and he looked, as I entered, the image of pale, rigid, iron, dumb despair. He held a letter and a strip of parchment in his hand: these he presented, and with white, stammering lips, bade me read. The letter was from an attorney of the name of Sawbridge, giving notice of an action of ejectment, to oust him from the possession of the Holmford estate, the property, according to Mr Sawbridge, of one Edwin Majoribanks; and the strip of parchment was the writ by which the letter had been quickly followed. I was astounded; and my scared looks questioned Mr Linden for further information. 'I do not quite understand it,' he said in a hoarse, palpitating voice. 'No possession or title in the venders: a niece not of age—executors no power to sell—Palliser

discovered it, robbed me, absconded, and I, O heavens! am a miserable beggar!'

The last words were uttered with a convulsive scream, and after a few frightful struggles he fell down in a fit. I had him conveyed to bed, and as soon as he was somewhat recovered, I hastened off to ascertain from Sawbridge, whom I knew very intimately, the nature of the claim intended to be set up for the plaintiff, Edwin Majoribanks.

I met Sawbridge just as he was leaving his office, and as he was in too great a hurry to turn back, I walked along with him, and he rapidly detailed the chief facts about to be embodied in the plaintiff's declaration. Archibald Dursley, once a London merchant, and who died a bachelor, had bequeathed his estate, real and personal, to his brother Charles, and a niece, his sister's child—two-thirds to the niece, and one-third to the brother. The Holmford property, the will directed, should be sold by public auction when the niece came of age, unless she, by marriage or otherwise, was enabled, within six months after attaining her majority, to pay over to Charles Dursley his third in money, according to a valuation made for the purpose by competent assessors. The brother, Charles Dursley, had urged upon the executors to anticipate the time directed by the will for the sale of the property; and having persuaded the niece to give a written authorisation for the immediate sale, the executors—chiefly, Sawbridge supposed, prompted by their own necessities—sold the estate accordingly. But the niece not being of age when she signed the authority to sell, her consent was of no legal value; and she having since died intestate, Edwin Majoribanks, her cousin and undoubted heir-at-law—for the property could not have passed from her, even by marriage—now claimed the estate. Charles Dursley, the

brother, was dead, 'and,' continued Mr Sawbridge, 'the worst of it is, Linden will never get a farthing of his purchase-money from the venders, for they are bankrupt; nor from Palliser, who has made permanent arrangements for continuing abroad, out of harm's reach. It is just as I tell you,' he added as we shook hands at parting; 'but you will of course see the will, and satisfy yourself. Good-bye.'

Here was a precious result of amateur common-sense lawiership! Linden could only have examined the abstract of title furnished him by Palliser's attorney, and not the right of Dursley's executors to sell; or had not been aware that the niece could not, during her minority, subscribe an effective legal consent.

I found Mr Flint at the office, and quickly imparted the astounding news. He was as much taken aback as myself.

'The obstinate, pig-headed old ass!' he exclaimed; 'it almost serves him right, if only for his Tom-fool nonsense of "Every man his own lawyer." What did you say was the niece's name?'

'Well, I don't remember that Sawbridge told me; he was in such a hurry. But suppose you go at once and look over the will?'

'True; I will do so;' and away he went.

'This is a very singular affair, Sharp,' said Mr Flint on his return from Doctors' Commons, at the same time com-
posedly seating himself, hooking his thumbs into the arm-
holes of his waistcoat, crossing his legs, and tilting his chair
back on its hind-legs—'a very singular affair. Whom,
in the name of the god of thieves—Mercury, wasn't he
called?—do you suppose the bankrupt executors to be?
No other,' continued Mr Flint with a sudden burst, 'than
Crowther and Jenkins!'

'Indeed! And the niece then is'——

'Catherine Arnold—Tom Linden's wife—supposed to have been drowned in the *Erin*! That's checkmate, I rather fancy—not only to Mr Edwin Majoribanks, but some one else we know of. The old fellow up-stairs won't refuse to acknowledge his daughter-in-law now, I fancy!'

This was indeed a happy change in the fortunes of the house of Linden; and we discussed, with much alacrity, the best mode of turning disclosures so momentous and surprising to the best account. As a first step, a letter, with an inclosure, was despatched to Belfast, requiring the return of Thomas Linden and family immediately; and the next was to plead in form to the action. This done, we awaited Catherine Linden's arrival in London, and Mr Linden senior's convalescence—for his mental agitation had resulted in a sharp fit of illness—to effect a satisfactory and just arrangement.

Mr and Mrs Thomas Linden and Mrs Arnold arrived by the earliest steamer that left Belfast after the receipt of our letter; and much astonished were they by the intelligence that awaited them. Catherine Linden was for confirming the validity of the sale of the Holmford estate by her now authoritative consent at once, as a mere act of common justice and good faith; but this, looking at the total loss of fortune she had sustained by the knavery of the executors, and the obstinate, mulish temper of the father-in-law, from whom she had already received such harsh treatment, could not for a moment be permitted; and it was finally resolved to take advantage of the legal position in which she stood, to enforce a due present provision for herself and husband, and their ultimate succession to the estate.

John Linden gradually recovered; and as soon as it was deemed prudent to do so, we informed him that the niece

was not dead, as the plaintiff in the action of ejectment had supposed, and that of course, if she could now be persuaded to ratify the imperative consent she had formerly subscribed, he might retain Holmford. At first he received the intelligence as a gleam of light and hope, but he soon relapsed into doubt and gloom. 'What chance was there,' he hopelessly argued, 'that, holding the legal power, she would not exercise it?' It was not, he said, in human nature to do otherwise; and he commissioned us to make liberal offers for a compromise; half—he would be content to lose half his purchase-money; even a greater sacrifice than that he would agree to—anything, indeed, that would not be utter ruin—that did not involve utter beggary and destitution in old age.

Three days after this conversation, I announced to him that the lady and her husband were below, and desirous of seeing him.

'What do they say?' he eagerly demanded. 'Will they accept of half—two-thirds? What do they say?'


'I cannot precisely tell you. They wish to see you alone, and you can urge your own views and offers.' He trembled violently, and shrank nervously back as I placed my hand on the door-handle of the private office. He presently recovered in some degree his self-possession, passed in; and I withdrew from the humiliating but salutary spectacle of obdurate tyrant power compelled to humble itself before those whom it had previously scorned and trampled upon.

The legal arrangements which Flint and I had suggested were effected, and Linden senior, accompanied by his son, daughter-in-law, and Mrs Arnold, set off in restored amity for Holmford House. Edwin Majoribanks abandoned his action; and Palliser, finding that matters were satisfactorily arranged, returned to England. We afterwards knew that he had discovered the defect of title, on applying to a well-

known conveyancer, to raise a considerable sum by way of mortgage, and that his first step was to threaten legal proceedings against Crowther and Jenkins for the recovery of his money; but a hint he obtained of the futility of proceedings against them, determined him to offer the estate at a low figure to Linden, relying upon that gentleman's ostentatious contempt of lawyers, that the blot in the title, subjected only to his own common-sense spectacles, would not be perceived.



THE PUZZLE.

TEMPUS FUGIT! The space of but a few brief yesterdays seems to have passed since the occurrence of the following out-of-the-way incidents—out-of-the-way even in our profession, fertile as it is in startling experiences; and yet the faithful and unerring tell-tale and monitor Anno Domini 1851 instructs me that a quarter of a century has nearly slipped by since the first scene in the complicated play of circumstances opened upon me. The date I remember well, for the Tower guns had been proclaiming with their thunder-throats the victory of Navarino but a short time before a clerk announced, ‘William Martin, with a message from Major Stewart.’

This William Martin was a rather sorry curiosity in his way. He was now in the service of our old client Major Stewart; and a tall, good-looking fellow enough, spite of a very decided cast in his eyes, which the rascal, when in his

cups—no unusual occurrence—declared he had caught from his former masters—Edward Thorneycroft, Esq., an enormously rich and exceedingly yellow East India director ; and his son, Mr Henry Thorneycroft, with whom, until lately transferred to Major Stewart's service, he had lived from infancy—his mother and father having formed part of the elder Thorneycroft's establishment when he was born. He had a notion in his head that he had better blood in his veins than the world supposed, and was excessively fond of aping the gentleman ; and this he did, I must say, with the ease and assurance of a stage-player. His name was scarcely out of the clerk's lips when he entered the inner office with a great effort at steadiness and deliberation, closed the door very carefully and importantly, hung his hat with much precision on a brass peg, and then steadying himself by the door-handle, surveyed the situation and myself with staring lack-lustre eyes and infinite gravity. I saw what was the matter.

'You have been in the *Sun*, Mr Martin ?'

A wink, inexpressible by words, replied to me, and I could see by the motion of the fellow's lips that speech was attempted ; but it came so thick that it was several minutes before I made out that he meant to say the British had been knocking the Turks about like bricks, and that he had been patriotically drinking the healths of the said British or bricks.

'Have the goodness, sir, to deliver your message, and then instantly leave the office.'

'Old Tho-o-o-rney,' was the hiccoughed reply, 'has smoked the — the plot. Young Thorney's done for. Ma-a-arried in a false name ; tra-ansportation—of course.'

'What gibberish is this about old Thorney and young Thorney ? Do you not come from Major Stewart ?'

'Ye-es, that's right: the route's arrived for the old trump: wishes to—to see you.'

'Major Stewart dying! Why, you are a more disgraceful scamp than I believed you to be.—Send this fellow away,' I added to a clerk who answered my summons. I then hastened off, and was speedily rattling over the stones towards Baker Street, Portman Square, where Major Stewart resided. As I left the office I heard Martin beg the clerk to lead him to the pump previous to sending him off—no doubt for the purpose of sobering himself somewhat previous to reappearing before the major, whose motives for hiring or retaining such a fellow in his modest establishment I could not at all understand.

'You were expected more than an hour ago,' said Dr Hampton, who was just leaving the house. 'The major is now, I fear, incapable of business.'

There was no time for explanation, and I hastily entered the sick-chamber. Major Stewart, though rapidly sinking, recognised me; and in obedience to a gesture from her master, the aged, weeping housekeeper left the room. The major's daughter, Rosamond Stewart, had been absent with her aunt, her father's maiden sister, on a visit, I understood, to some friends in Scotland, and had not, I concluded, been made acquainted with the major's illness, which had only assumed a dangerous character a few days previously. The old soldier was dying calmly and painlessly—rather from exhaustion of strength, a general failure of the powers of life, than from any especial disease. A slight flush tinged the mortal pallor of his face as I entered, and the eyes emitted a slightly reproachful expression.

'It is not more, my dear sir,' I replied softly but eagerly to his look, 'than a quarter of an hour ago that I received your message.'

I do not know whether he comprehended or even distinctly heard what I said, for his feeble but extremely anxious glance was directed whilst I spoke to a large oil-portrait of Rosamond Stewart, suspended over the mantel-piece. The young lady was a splendid dark-eyed beauty, and of course the pride and darling of her father. Presently wrenching, as it were, his eyes from the picture, he looked in my face with great earnestness, and bending my ear close to his lips, I heard him feebly and brokenly say: 'A question to ask you, that's all: read—read!' His hand motioned towards a letter which lay open on the bed. I ran it over, and the major's anxiety was at once explained. Rosamond Stewart had, I found, been a short time previously married in Scotland to Henry Thorneycroft, the son of the wealthy East India director. Finding his illness becoming serious, the major had anticipated the time and mode in which the young people had determined to break the intelligence to the irascible father of the bridegroom, and the result was the furious and angry letter in reply which I was perusing. Mr Thorneycroft would never, he declared, recognise the marriage of his undutiful nephew—nephew, *not* son; for he was, the letter announced, the child of an only sister, whose marriage had also mortally offended Mr Thorneycroft, and had been brought up from infancy as his (Mr Thorneycroft's) son, in order that the hated name of Allerton, to which the boy was alone legally entitled, might never offend his ear. There was something added insinuating of a doubt of the legality of the marriage, in consequence of the misnomer of the bridegroom at the ceremony.

'One question,' muttered the major as I finished the perusal of the letter: 'Is Rosamond's marriage legal?'

'No question about it. How could any one suppose that an involuntary misdescription can affect such a contract?'

‘Enough—enough!’ he gasped. ‘A great load is gone!—the rest is with God. Beloved Rosamond’—— The slight whisper was no longer audible; sighs, momentarily becoming fainter and weaker, followed—ceased, and in little more than ten minutes after the last word was spoken life was extinct. I rang the bell, and turned to leave the room, and as I did so surprised Martin on the other side of the bed. He had been listening, screened by the thick damask curtains, and appeared to be a good deal sobered. I made no remark, and proceeded down-stairs. The man followed, and as soon as we had gained the hall said quickly yet hesitatingly: ‘Sir—sir!’

‘Well, what have you to say?’

‘Nothing very particular, sir. But did I understand you to say just now that it was of no consequence if a man married in a false name?’

‘That depends upon circumstances. Why do you ask?’

‘Oh, nothing—nothing: only I have heard it’s transportation, especially if there’s money.’

‘Perhaps you are right. Anything else?’

‘No,’ said he, opening the door: ‘that’s all—mere curiosity.’

I heard nothing more of the family for some time, except with reference to Major Stewart’s personal property, about four thousand pounds, bequeathed to his daughter, with a charge thereon of an annuity of twenty pounds a year for Mrs Leslie, the aged housekeeper; the necessary business connected with which we transacted. But about a twelvemonth after the major’s death, the marriage of the elder Thorneycroft with a widow of the same name as himself, and a cousin, the paper stated, was announced; and pretty nearly a year and a half subsequent to the appearance of this ominous paragraph, the decease of Mr Henry Thorneycroft at Lausanne in

Switzerland, who had left, it was added in the stock-phrase of journalism, a young widow and two sons to mourn their irreparable loss. Silence again, as far as we were concerned, settled upon the destinies of the descendants of our old military client, till one fine morning a letter from Dr Hampton informed us of the sudden death by apoplexy, a few days previously, of the East India director. Dr Hampton further hinted that he should have occasion to write us again in a day or two relative to the deceased's affairs, which, owing to Mr Thorneycroft's unconquerable aversion to making a will, had, it was feared, been left in an extremely unsatisfactory state. Dr Hampton had written to us at the widow's request, in consequence of his having informed her that we had been the professional advisers of Major Stewart, and were in all probability those of his daughter Mrs Henry Allerton.

We did not quite comprehend the drift of this curious epistle ; but although not specially instructed, we determined to at once write to Mrs Rosamond Thorneycroft or Allerton, who with her family was still abroad, and in the meantime take such formal steps in her behalf as might appear necessary.

We were not long in doubt as to the motives of the extremely civil application to ourselves on the part of the widow of the East India director. The deceased's wealth had been almost all invested in land, which went, he having died intestate, to his nephew's son Henry Allerton ; and the personals in which the widow would share were consequently of very small amount. Mrs Thorneycroft was therefore anxious to propose, through us, a more satisfactory and equitable arrangement. We could of course say nothing till the arrival of Mrs Rosamond Allerton, for which, however, we had only a brief time to wait. There was, we found, no indisposition on that lady's part to act

with generosity towards Mr Thorneycroft's widow—a showy vulgarish person, by the way, of about forty years of age—but there was a legal difficulty in the way in consequence of the heir-at-law being a minor. Mrs Thorneycroft became at length terribly incensed, and talked a good deal of angry nonsense about disputing the claim of Henry Allerton's son to the estates, on the ground that his marriage, having been contracted in a wrong name, was null and void. Several annoying paragraphs got in consequence into the Sunday newspapers, and these brought about a terrible disclosure.

About twelve o'clock one day, the Widow Thorneycroft bounced unceremoniously into the office, dragging in with her a comely and rather interesting-looking young woman, but of a decidedly rustic complexion and accent, and followed by a grave middle-aged clergyman. The widow's large eyes sparkled with strong excitement, and her somewhat swarthy features were flushed with hot blood.

'I have brought you,' she burst out abruptly, 'the *real* Mrs Allerton, and'——

'No, no!' interrupted the young woman, who appeared much agitated—'Thorneycroft, not Allerton!'——

'I know, child—I know; but that is nothing to the purpose. This young person is, Mr Sharp, I repeat, the true and lawful Mrs Henry Allerton.'

'Pooh!' I answered; 'do you take us for idiots? This,' I added with some sternness, 'is either a ridiculous misapprehension or an attempt at imposture, and I am very careless which it may be.'

'You are mistaken, sir,' rejoined the clergyman mildly. 'This young woman was certainly married by me at Swindon Church, Wilts, to a gentleman of the name of Henry Thorneycroft, who, it appears from the newspapers, confirmed by this lady, was no other than Mr Henry

Allerton. This marriage, we find, took place six months previously to that contracted with Rosamond Stewart. I have further to say that this young woman, Maria Emsbury, is a very respectable person, and that her marriage-portion, of a little more than eight hundred pounds, was given to her husband, whom she has only seen thrice since her marriage, to support himself till the death of his reputed father, constantly asserted by him to be imminent.'

'A story very smoothly told, and I have no doubt in your opinion quite satisfactory; but there is one slight matter which I fancy you will find somewhat difficult of proof: I mean the identity of Maria Emsbury's husband with the son or nephew of the late Mr Thorneycroft.'

'He always said he was the son of the rich East Indian Mr Thorneycroft,' said the young woman with a hysterical sob; 'and here,' she added, 'is his picture in his wedding-dress—that of an officer of the Gloucestershire Yeomanry. He gave it me the day before the wedding.'

I almost snatched the portrait. Sure enough it was a miniature of Henry Allerton: there could be no doubt about that.

Mr Flint, who had been busy with some papers, here approached and glanced at the miniature.

I was utterly confounded, and my partner, I saw, was equally dismayed; and no wonder, entertaining as we both did the highest respect and admiration for the high-minded and beautiful daughter of Major Stewart.

The Widow Thorneycroft's exultation was exuberant.

'As this only legal marriage,' said she, 'has been blessed with no issue, I am of course, as you must be aware, the legitimate heiress-at-law, as my deceased husband's nearest blood-relative. I shall, however,' she added, 'take care to amply provide for my widowed niece-in-law.'

The young woman made a profound rustic courtesy, and tears of unaffected gratitude, I observed, filled her eyes.

The game was not, however, to be quite so easily surrendered as they appeared, to imagine. 'Tut! tut!' exclaimed Mr Flint bluntly: 'this may be mere imposition. Who knows how the portrait has been obtained?'

The girl's eyes flashed with honest anger. There was no imposition about her, I felt assured. 'Here are other proofs. My husband's signet-ring, left accidentally, I think, with me, and two letters which I from curiosity took out of his coat-pocket—the day, I am pretty sure it was, after we were married.'

'If this cumulative circumstantial evidence does not convince you, gentlemen,' added the Rev. Mr Wishart, 'I have direct personal testimony to offer. You know Mr Angerstein of Bath?'

'I do.'

'Well, Mr Henry Thorneycroft or Allerton was at the time this marriage took place on a visit to that gentleman; and I myself saw the bridegroom, whom I had united a fortnight previously in Swindon church, walking arm-in-arm with Mr Angerstein in Sydney Gardens, Bath. I was at some little distance, but I recognised both distinctly, and bowed. Mr Angerstein returned my salutation, and he recollects the circumstance distinctly. The gentleman walking with him in the uniform of the Gloucestershire Yeomanry was, Mr Angerstein is prepared to depose, Mr Henry Thorneycroft or Allerton.'

'You waste time, reverend sir,' said Mr Flint with an affectation of firmness and unconcern he was, I knew, far from feeling. 'We are the attorneys of Mrs Rosamond Allerton, and shall, I daresay, if you push us to it, be able to tear this ingeniously coloured cobweb of yours to shreds.

If you determine on going to law, your solicitor can serve us; we will enter an appearance, and our client will be spared unnecessary annoyance.'

They were about to leave, when, as ill-luck would have it, one of the clerks, who, deceived by the momentary silence, and from not having been at home when the unwelcome visitors arrived, believed we were disengaged, opened the door, and admitted Mrs Rosamond Allerton and her aunt Miss Stewart. Before we could interpose with a word, the Widow Thorneycroft burst out with the whole story in a torrent of exultant volubility that it was impossible to check or restrain.

For a while contemptuous incredulity, indignant scorn, upheld the assailed lady; but as proof after proof was hurled at her, reinforced by the grave soberness of the clergyman and the weeping sympathy of the young woman, her firmness gave way, and she swooned in her aunt's arms. We should have more peremptorily interfered but for our unfortunate client's deprecatory gestures. She seemed determined to hear the worst at once. Now, however, we had the office cleared of the intruders without much ceremony, and as soon as the horror-stricken lady was sufficiently recovered, she was conducted to her carriage, and after arranging for an early interview on the morrow, was driven off.

I found our interesting and, I feared, deeply injured client much recovered from the shock which on the previous day had overwhelmed her; and although exceedingly pale and still painfully agitated, there was hope, almost confidence in her eye and tone.

'There is some terrible misapprehension in this frightful affair, Mr Sharp,' she began. 'Henry, my husband, was utterly incapable of a mean or dishonest act, much less of such utter baseness as this of which he is accused. They

also say, do they not,' she continued with a smile of haughty contempt, 'that he robbed the young woman of her poor dowry—some eight hundred pounds? A proper story!'

'That, I confess, from what little I knew of Mr Henry Thorneycroft, stamps the whole affair as a fabrication; and yet the Reverend Mr Wishart—a gentleman of high character, I understand—is very positive. The young woman, too, appeared truthful and sincere.'

'Yes; it cannot be denied. Let me say also—for it is best to look at the subject on its darkest side—I find, on looking over my letters, that my husband was staying with Mr Angerstein at the time stated. He was also at that period in the Gloucestershire Yeomanry. I gave William Martin but the other day a suit of his regimentals very little the worse for wear.'

'You forget to state, Rosamond,' said Miss Stewart, who was sitting beside her niece, 'that Martin, who was with his young master at Bath, is willing to make oath that no such marriage took place as asserted at Swindon church.'

'That alone would, I fear, my good madam, very little avail. Can I see William Martin?'

'Certainly.' The bell was rung, and the necessary order given.

'This Martin is much changed for the better, I hear.'

'O yes, entirely so,' said Miss Stewart. 'He is also exceedingly attached to us all, the children especially; and his grief and anger when informed of what had occurred thoroughly attest his faithfulness and sincerity.'

Martin entered, and was, I thought, somewhat confused by my apparently unexpected presence. A look at his face and head dissipated a half-suspicion that had arisen in both Flint's mind and my own.

I asked him a few questions relative to the sojourn of his master at Bath, and then said: 'I wish you to go with me and see this Maria Emsbury.'

As I spoke, something seemed to attract Martin's attention in the street, and suddenly turning round, his arm swept a silver pastil-stand off the table. He stooped down to gather up the dispersed pastils, and as he did so, said in answer to my request, that he had not the slightest objection to do so.

'That being the case, we will set off at once, as she and her friends are probably at the office by this time. They are desirous of settling the matter off-hand,' I added with a smile, addressing Mrs Allerton, 'and avoiding, if possible, the delays and uncertainties of the law.'

As I anticipated, the formidable trio were with Mr Flint. I introduced Martin, and as I did so watched, with an anxiety I could hardly have given a reason for, the effect of his appearance upon the young woman. I observed nothing. He was evidently an utter stranger to her; although, from the involuntary flush which crossed his features, it occurred to me that he was in some way an accomplice with his deceased master in the cruel and infamous crime which had, I strongly feared, been perpetrated.

'Was this person present at your marriage?' I asked.

'Certainly not. But I think—now I look at him—that I have seen him somewhere—about Swindon it must have been.'

William Martin mumbled out that he had never been at Swindon; neither, he was sure, had his master.

'What is that?' said the girl, looking sharply up and suddenly colouring: 'what is that?'

Martin, a good deal abashed, again mumbled out his belief that young Mr Thorneycroft, as he was then called, had never been at Swindon.

The indignant scarlet deepened on the young woman's face and temples, and she looked at Martin with fixed attention and surprise. Presently recovering, as if from some vague confusedness of mind, she said: 'What you *believe* can be of no consequence: truth is truth for all that.'

The Rev. Mr Wishart here interposed, remarking that as it was quite apparent we were determined to defend the usurpation by Miss Rosamond Stewart—a lady to be greatly pitied, no doubt—of another's right, it was useless to prolong or renew the interview; and all three took immediate leave. A few minutes afterwards Martin also departed, still vehemently asserting that no such marriage ever took place at Swindon or anywhere else.

No stone, as people say, was left unturned by us, in the hope of discovering some clue that might enable us to unravel the tangled web of coherent yet, looking at the character of young Mr Allerton, *improbable* circumstances. We were unsuccessful; and unfortunately many other particulars which came to light but deepened the adverse complexion of the case. Two respectable persons living at Swindon were ready to depose on oath that they had on more than one occasion seen Maria Emsbury's sweetheart with Mr Angerstein at Bath; once especially at the theatre, upon the benefit-night of the great Edmund Kean, who had been playing there for a few nights.

The entire case, fully stated, was ultimately laid by us before eminent counsel, and we were advised that the evidence as set forth by us could not be contended against with any chance of success. This sad conclusion was communicated by me to Mrs Allerton, as she still unswervingly believed herself to be, and was received with more constancy and firmness than I had expected. Her faith in her husband's truth and honour was not in the slightest

degree shaken by the accumulated proofs. She would not, however, attempt to resist them before a court of law. Something would, she was confident, thereafter come to light that would vindicate the truth; and confiding in our zeal and watchfulness, she, her aunt, and children, would in the meantime shelter themselves from the gaze of the world in their former retreat at Lausanne.

This being the unhappy lady's final determination, I gave the other side notice that we should be ready on a given day to surrender possession of the house and effects in South Audley Street, which the Widow Thorneycroft had given up to her supposed niece-in-law and family on their arrival in England, and to re-obtain which, and thereby decide the whole question in dispute, legal proceedings had already been commenced.

On the morning appointed for the purpose—having taken leave of the ladies the day previously—I proceeded to South Audley Street, to formally give up possession, under protest, however. The niece and aunt were not yet gone. This, I found, was owing to Martin, who, according to the ladies, was so beside himself with grief and rage, that he had been unable to expedite as he ought to have done the packing intrusted to his care. I was vexed at this, as the Widow Thorneycroft, her *protégée*, and the Rev. Mr Wishart, accompanied by a solicitor, were shortly expected; and it was desirable that a meeting of the antagonistic parties should be avoided. I descended to the lower regions to remonstrate with and hurry Martin, and found, as I feared, that his former evil habits had returned upon him. It was not yet twelve o'clock, and he was already partially intoxicated, and pale, trembling, and nervous from the effects, it was clear to me, of the previous night's debauch.

'Your mistress is grossly deceived in you!' I angrily exclaimed; 'and if my advice were taken, you would be

turned out of the house at once without a character. There ; don't attempt to bamboozle me with that nonsense ; I've seen fellows crying drunk before now.'

He stammered out some broken excuses, to which I very impatiently listened ; and so thoroughly muddled did his brain appear, that he either could not or would not comprehend the possibility of Mrs Allerton and her children being turned out of house and home, as he expressed it, and over and over again asked me if nothing could yet be done to prevent it. I was completely disgusted with the fellow, and sharply bidding him hasten his preparations for departure, rejoined the ladies, who were by this time assembled in the back drawing-room, ready shawled and bonneted for their journey. It was a sad sight. Rosamond Stewart's splendid face was shadowed by deep and bitter grief, borne, it is true, with pride and fortitude ; but it was easy to see its throbbing pulsations through all the forced calmness of the surface. Her aunt, of a weaker nature, sobbed loudly in the fullness of her grief ; and the children, shrinking instinctively in the chilling atmosphere of a great calamity, clung, trembling and half terrified, the eldest especially, to their mother. I did not insult them with phrases of condolence, but turned the conversation, if such it could be called, upon their future home and prospects in Switzerland. Some time had thus elapsed when my combative propensities were suddenly aroused by the loud dash of a carriage to the door and the peremptory rat-tat-tat which followed. I felt my cheek flame as I said : 'They demand admittance as if in possession of an assured, decided right. It is not yet too late to refuse possession, and take the chances of the law's uncertainty.'

Mrs Allerton shook her head with decisive meaning. 'I could not bear it,' she said in a tone of sorrowful

gentleness. 'But I trust we shall not be intruded upon.'

I hurried out of the apartment and met the triumphant claimants. I explained the cause of the delay, and suggested that Mrs Thorneycroft and her friends could amuse themselves in the garden whilst the solicitor and I ran over the inventory of the chief valuables to be surrendered together.

This was agreed to. A minute or two before the conclusion of this necessary formality, I received a message from the ladies expressive of a wish to be gone at once, if I would escort them to the hotel; and Martin, who was nowhere to be found, could follow. I hastened to comply with their wishes; and we were just about to issue from the front drawing-room, into which we had passed through the folding-doors, when we were confronted by the widow and her party, who had just reached the landing of the great staircase. We drew back in silence. The mutual confusion into which we were thrown caused a momentary hesitation only, and we were passing on, when the butler suddenly appeared.

'A gentleman,' he said, 'an officer, is at the door, who wishes to see a Miss Maria Emsbury, formerly of Swindon.'

I stared at the man, discerned a strange expression in his face, and it glanced across me at the same moment that I had heard no knock at the door.

'See Miss Emsbury?' exclaimed the Widow Thorneycroft, recovering her speech: 'there is no such person here!'

'Pardon me, madam,' I cried, catching eagerly at the interruption, as a drowning man is said to do at a straw: 'this young person *was* at least Miss Emsbury. Desire the officer to walk up.' The butler vanished instantly, and we all huddled back disorderly into the drawing-room, some one closing the door after us. I felt the grasp of

Mrs Allerton's arm tighten convulsively round mine, and her breath I heard came quick and short. I was hardly less agitated myself.

Steps—slow and deliberate steps—were presently heard ascending the stairs; the door opened, and in walked a gentleman in the uniform of a yeomanry officer, whom at the first glance I could have sworn to be the deceased Mr Henry Allerton. A slight exclamation of terror escaped Mrs Allerton, followed by a loud hysterical scream from the Swindon young woman, as she staggered forward towards the stranger, exclaiming; 'O merciful God!—my husband!' and then fell, overcome with emotion, in his outstretched arms.

'Yes,' said the Rev. Mr Wishart promptly, 'that is certainly the gentleman I visited to Maria Emsbury. What can be the meaning of this scene?'

'Is that sufficient, Mr Sharp?' exclaimed the officer in a voice that removed all doubt.

Quite, quite,' I shouted—'more than enough!'

'Very well, then,' said William Martin, dashing off his black curling wig, removing his whiskers of the same colour, and giving his own light but now cropped head of hair and clean-shaved cheeks to view. 'Now, then, send for the police, and let them transport me: I richly merit it. I married this young woman in a false name; I robbed her of her money, and I deserve the hulks, if anybody ever did.'

You might have heard a pin drop in the apartment whilst the repentant rascal thus spoke; and when he ceased, Mrs Allerton, unable to bear up against the tumultuous emotion which his words excited, sank without breath or sensation upon a sofa. Assistance was summoned; and whilst the as yet imperfectly informed servants were running from one to another with restoratives, I had leisure to look

around. The Widow Thornycroft, who had dropped into a chair, sat gazing in bewildered dismay upon the stranger, who still held her lately discovered niece-in-law in his arms ; and I could see the hot perspiration which had gathered on her brow run in large drops down the white channels which they traced through the thick rouge of her cheeks. But the reader's fancy will supply the best image of this unexpected and extraordinary scene. I cleared the house of intruders and visitors as speedily as possible, well assured that matters would now adjust themselves without difficulty.

And so it proved. Martin was not sent to the hulks, though no question that he amply deserved a punishment as great as that. The self-sacrifice, as he deemed it, which he at last made pleaded for him, and so did his pretty-looking wife ; and the upshot was that the mistaken bride's dowry was restored, with something over, and that a tavern was taken for them in Piccadilly—the *White Bear* I think it was—where they lived comfortably and happily, I have heard, for a considerable time, and having considerably added to their capital, removed to a hotel of a higher grade in the City, where they now reside. It was not at all surprising that the clergyman and others had been deceived. The disguise and Martin's imitative talent, might have misled persons on their guard, much more men unsuspecting of deception. The cast in the eyes, as well as a general resemblance of features, also of course greatly aided the imposture.

Of Mrs Rosamond Allerton I have only to say, for it is all I know, that judging from the placid brightness of her aspect she was still beautiful and happy the last time I saw her beneath the transept of the Crystal Palace, on the occasion of its opening by the Queen. I remember wondering at the time if she often recalled to mind the passage in her life which I have here recorded.



THE INCENDIARY.



KNEW James Dutton, as I shall call him, at an early period of life, when my present scanty locks of iron-gray were thick and dark; and my now pale and furrowed cheeks were fresh and ruddy, like his own. Time, circumstances, and natural bent of mind, have done their work on both of us; and if his course of life has been less equable than mine, it has been chiefly so because the original impulse, the first start on the great journey, upon which so much depends, was directed by wiser heads in my case than in his. We were school-fellows for a considerable time; and if I acquired—as I certainly did—a larger stock of knowledge than he, it was by no means from any superior capacity on my part, but that his mind was bent on other pursuits. He was a born Nimrod, and his father encouraged this propensity from the earliest moment that his darling and only son could sit a pony, or handle a light fowling-piece. Dutton, senior, was one of a then large class of persons,

whom Cobbett used to call bull-frog farmers; men who, finding themselves daily increasing in wealth by the operation of circumstances they neither created nor could insure or control—namely, a rapidly increasing manufacturing population, and tremendous war-prices for their produce—acted as if the chance-blown prosperity they enjoyed was the result of their own forethought, skill, and energy, and therefore, humanly speaking, indestructible. James Dutton was, consequently, denied nothing—not even the luxury of neglecting his own education; and he availed himself of that lamentable privilege to a great extent. It was, however, a remarkable feature in the lad's character, that whatever he himself deemed essential should be done, no amount of indulgence, no love of sport or dissipation, could divert him from thoroughly accomplishing. Thus he saw clearly, that even in the life—that of a sportsman-farmer—he had chalked out for himself, it was indispensably necessary that a certain quantum of educational power should be attained; and so he really acquired a knowledge of reading, writing, and spelling, and then withdrew from school to more congenial avocations.

I frequently met James Dutton in after-years; but some nine or ten months had passed since I had last seen him, when I was directed by the chief partner in the firm to which Flint and I subsequently succeeded, to take coach for Romford, Essex, in order to ascertain from a witness there what kind of evidence we might expect him to give in a trial to come off in the then Hilary term, at Westminster Hall. It was the first week in January; the weather was bitterly cold; and I experienced an intense satisfaction when, after despatching the business I had come upon, I found myself in the long dining-room of the chief market-inn, where two blazing fires shed a ruddy, cheerful light over the snow-white damask table-cloth,

bright glasses, decanters, and other preparatives for the farmers' market-dinner. Prices had ruled high that day ; wheat had reached thirty pounds a load ; and the numerous groups of hearty, stalwart yeomen present were in high glee, crowing and exulting alike over their full pockets and the news—of which the papers were just then full—of the burning of Moscow, and the flight and ruin of Bonaparte's army. James Dutton was in the room, but not, I observed, in his usual flow of animal spirits. The crape round his hat might, I thought, account for that ; and as he did not see me, I accosted him with an inquiry after his health, and the reason of his being in mourning. He received me very cordially, and in an instant cast off the abstracted manner I had noticed. His father, he informed me, was gone—had died about seven months previously, and he was alone now at Ash Farm—why didn't I run down there to see him sometimes, &c. ? Our conversation was interrupted by a summons to dinner, very cheerfully complied with ; and we both—at least I can answer for myself—did ample justice to a more than usually excellent dinner, even in those capital old market-dinner times. We were very jolly afterwards, and amazingly triumphant over the frost-bitten, snow-buried soldier-banditti that had so long lorded it over continental Europe. Dutton did not partake of the general hilarity. There was a sneer upon his lip during the whole time, which, however, found no expression in words.

'How quiet you are, James Dutton !' cried a loud voice from out the dense smoke-cloud that by this time completely enveloped us. On looking towards the spot from whence the ringing tones came, a jolly, round face—like the sun as seen through a London fog—gleamed redly dull from out the thick and choking atmosphere.

'Everybody,' rejoined Dutton, 'hasn't had the luck to

sell two hundred quarters of wheat at to-day's price, as you have, Tom Southall.'

'That's true, my boy,' returned Master Southall, sending, in the plenitude of his satisfaction, a jet of smoke towards us with astonishing force. 'And, I say Jem, I'll tell ee what I'll do; I'll clap on ten guineas more upon what I offered for the brown mare.'

'Done! She's yours, Tom, then, for ninety guineas!'

'Gie's your hand upon it!' cried Tom Southall, jumping up from his chair, and stretching a fist as big as a leg of mutton—well, say lamb—over the table. 'And here—here,' he added, with an exultant chuckle, as he extricated a swollen canvas-bag from his pocket—'here's the dibs at once.'

This transaction excited a great deal of surprise at our part of the table; and Dutton was rigorously cross-questioned as to his reason for parting with his favourite hunting mare.

'The truth is, friends,' said Dutton at last, 'I mean to give up farming, and'——

'Gie up farmin'!' broke in half-a-dozen voices. 'Lord!'

'Yes; I don't like it. I shall buy a commission in the army. There'll be a chance against Boney, now; and it's a life I'm fit for.'

The farmers looked completely agape at this announcement; but making nothing of it, after silently staring at Dutton and each other, with their pipes in their hands and not in their mouths, till they had gone out, stretched their heads simultaneously across the table towards the candles, relit their pipes, and smoked on as before.

'Then, perhaps, Mr Dutton,' said a young man in a smartly-cut velveteen coat with mother-of-pearl buttons, who had hastily left his seat farther down the table—perhaps you will sell the double Manton, and Fanny and Slut?'

‘Yes ; at a price.’

Prices were named ; I forget now the exact sums, but enormous prices, I thought, for the gun and the dogs, Fanny and Slut. The bargain was eagerly concluded, and the money paid at once. Possibly the buyer had a vague notion that a portion of the vender’s skill might come to him with his purchases.

‘You be in ’arnest, then, in this fool’s business, James Dutton,’ observed a farmer gravely. ‘I be sorry for thee ; but as I s’pose the lease of Ash Farm will be parted with ; why—— John, waiter, tell Mr Hurst at the top of the table yonder, to come this way.’

Master Hurst, a well-to-do, highly respectable-looking, and rather elderly man, came in obedience to the summons, and after a few words in an under-tone with the friend that had sent for him, said : ‘Is this true, James Dutton ?’

‘It is true that the lease and stock of Ash Farm are to be sold—at a price. You, I believe, are in want of such a concern for the young couple, just married.’

‘Well, I don’t say I might not be a customer, if the price were reasonable.’

‘Let us step into a private room, then,’ said Dutton rising. This is not a place for business of that kind.—Sharp,’ he added, *sotto voce*, ‘come with us ; I may want you.’

I had listened to all this with a kind of stupid wonderment, and I now, mechanically as it were, got up and accompanied the party to another room.

The matter was soon settled. Five hundred pounds for the lease—ten years unexpired—of Ash Farm, about eleven hundred acres, and the stock, implements ; the ploughing, sowing, &c. already performed, to be paid for at a valuation based on present prices. I drew out the agreement in form, it was signed in duplicate, a large sum was paid down as deposit, and Mr Hurst with his friend withdrew.

‘Well,’ I said, taking a glass of port from a bottle Dutton had just ordered in—‘here’s fortune in your new career; but as I am a living man, I can’t understand what you can be thinking about.’

‘You haven’t read the newspapers?’

‘O yes, I have! Victory! Glory! March to Paris! and all that sort of thing. Very fine, I daresay; but rubbish, moonshine, I call it, if purchased by the abandonment of the useful, comfortable, joyous life of a prosperous yeoman.’

‘Is that all you have seen in the papers?’

‘Not much else. What, besides, have you found in them?’

‘Wheat, at ten or eleven pounds a load—less perhaps—other produce in proportion.’

‘Ha!’

‘I see farther, Sharp, than you bookmen do, in some matters. Boney’s done for; that to me is quite plain, and earlier than I thought likely; although I, of course, as well as every other man with a head instead of a turnip on his shoulders, knew such a raw-head-and-bloody-bones as that must sooner or later come to the dogs. And as I also know what agricultural prices were *before* the war, I can calculate without the aid of vulgar fractions, which, by-the-bye, I never reached, what they’ll be when it’s over, and the thundering expenditure now going on is stopped. In two or three weeks, people generally will get a dim notion of all this; and I sell, therefore, whilst I can, at top prices.’

The shrewdness of the calculation struck me at once. ‘You will take another farm when one can be had on easier terms than now, I suppose?’

‘Yes; if I can manage it. And I *will* manage it. Between ourselves, after all the old man’s debts are paid, I

shall only have about nine or ten hundred pounds to the good, even by selling at the present tremendous rates; so it was time, you see, I pulled up, and rubbed the fog out of my eyes a bit. And, hark ye, Master Sharp!' he added, as we rose and shook hands with each other—'I have now done *playing* with the world—it's a place of work and business; and I'll do my share of it so effectually, that my children, if I have any, shall, if I do not, reach the class of landed gentry; and this you'll find, for all your sneering, will come about all the more easily that neither they nor their father will be encumbered with much educational lumber. Good-bye.'

I did not again see my old school-fellow till the change he had predicted had thoroughly come to pass. Farms were everywhere to let, and a general cry to parliament for aid rang through the land. Dutton called at the office upon business, accompanied by a young woman of remarkable personal comeliness, but, as a very few sentences betrayed, little or no education in the conventional sense of the word. She was the daughter of a farmer, whom—it was no fault of hers—a change of times had not found in a better condition for weathering them. Anne Mosely, in fact, was a thoroughly industrious, clever farm economist. The instant Dutton had secured an eligible farm, at his own price and conditions, he married her; and now, on the third day after the wedding, he had brought me the draft of lease for examination.

'You are not afraid, then,' I remarked, 'of taking a farm in these bad times?'

'Not I—at a price. We mean to *rough* it, Mr Sharp,' he added gaily. 'And let me tell you, that those who will stoop to do that—I mean, take their coats off, tuck up their sleeves, and fling appearances to the winds—may, and will, if they understand their business, and have

got their heads screwed on right, do better here than in any of the uncleared countries they talk so much about. You know what I told you down at Romford. Well, we'll manage that before our hair is gray, 'depend upon it, bad as the times may be—won't we, Nance?'

'We'll try, Jem,' was the smiling response.

They left the draft for examination. It was found to be correctly drawn. Two or three days afterwards, the deeds were executed, and James Dutton was placed in possession. The farm, a capital one, was in Essex.

His hopes were fully realised as to money-making at all events. He and his wife rose early, sat up late, ate the bread of carefulness, and altogether displayed such persevering energy, that only about six or seven years had passed before the Duttons were accounted a rich and prosperous family. They had one child only—a daughter. The mother, Mrs Dutton, died when this child was about twelve years of age; and Anne Dutton became more than ever the apple of her father's eye. The business of the farm went steadily on in its accustomed track; each succeeding year found James Dutton growing in wealth and importance; and his daughter in sparkling, catching comeliness—although certainly not in the refinement of manner which gives a quickening life and grace to personal symmetry and beauty. James Dutton remained firm in his theory of the worthlessness of education beyond what, in a narrow acceptation of the term, was absolutely 'necessary;' and Anne Dutton, although now heiress to very considerable wealth, knew only how to read, write, spell, cast accounts, and superintend the home-business of the farm. I saw a good deal of the Duttons about this time, my brother-in-law, Elsworthy, and his wife having taken up their abode within about half a mile of James Dutton's dwelling-house; and I ventured once or twice to remonstrate

with the prosperous farmer upon the positive danger, with reference to his ambitious views, of not at least so far cultivating the intellect and taste of so attractive a maiden as his daughter, that sympathy on her part with the rude, unlettered clowns, with whom she necessarily came so much in contact, should be impossible. He laughed my hints to scorn. 'It is idleness—idleness alone,' he said, 'that puts love-fancies into girls' heads. Novel-reading, jingling at a pianoforte—merely other names for idleness—these are the parents of such follies. Anne Dutton, as mistress of this establishment, has her time fully and usefully occupied; and when the time comes, not far distant now, to establish her in marriage, she will wed into a family I wot of; and the Romford prophesy of which you remind me will be realised, in great part at least.'

He found, too late, his error. He hastily entered the office one morning, and although it was only five or six weeks since I had last seen him, the change in his then florid, prideful features was so striking and painful, as to cause me to fairly leap upon my feet with surprise.

'Good Heavens, Dutton!' I exclaimed, 'what is the matter? What has happened?'

'Nothing has happened, Mr Sharp,' he replied, 'but what you predicted, and which, had I not been the most conceited dolt in existence, I, too, must have foreseen. You know that good-looking, idle, and, I fear, irreclaimable young fellow, George Hamblin?'

'I have seen him once or twice. Has he not brought his father to the verge of a workhouse by low dissipation and extravagance?'

'Yes. Well, he is an accepted suitor for Anne Dutton's hand. No wonder that you start. She fancies herself hopelessly in love with him—— Nay, Sharp, hear me out. I have tried expostulation, threats, entreaties, locking

her up ; but it's useless. I shall kill the silly fool if I persist, and I have at length consented to the marriage ; for I cannot see her die.' I began remonstrating upon the folly of yielding consent to so ruinous a marriage, on account of a few tears and hysterics, but Dutton stopped me peremptorily.

'It is useless talking,' he said. 'The die is cast ; I have given my word. You would hardly recognise her, she is so altered. I did not know before,' added the strong, stern man, with trembling voice and glistening eyes, 'that she was so inextricably twined about my heart—my life !' It is difficult to estimate the bitterness of such a disappointment to a proud, aspiring man like Dutton. I pitied him sincerely, mistaken, if not blameworthy, as he had been.

'I have only myself to blame,' he presently resumed. 'A girl of cultivated taste and mind could not have bestowed a second thought on George Hamblin. But let's to business. I wish the marriage-settlement, and my will, to be so drawn, that every farthing received from me during my life, and after my death, shall be hers, and hers only ; and so strictly and entirely secured, that she shall be without power to yield control over the slightest portion of it, should she be so minded.' I took down his instructions, and the necessary deeds were drawn in accordance with them. When the day for signing arrived, the bridegroom-elect demurred at first to the stringency of the provisions of the marriage-contract ; but as upon this point Mr Dutton was found to be inflexible, the handsome, illiterate clown—he was little better—gave up his scruples, the more readily as a life of assured idleness lay before him, from the virtual control he was sure to have over his wife's income. These were the thoughts which passed across his mind, I was quite sure, as taking the pen awkwardly in his hand, he affixed *his mark* to the marriage-deed. I reddened with

shame, and the smothered groan which at the moment smote faintly on my ear, again brokenly confessed the miserable folly of the father in not having placed his beautiful child beyond all possibility of mental contact or communion with such a person. The marriage was shortly afterwards solemnised, but I did not wait to witness the ceremony.

The husband's promised good-behaviour did not long endure; ere two months of wedded life were past, he had fallen again into his old habits; and the wife, bitterly repentant of her folly, was fain to confess, that nothing but dread of her father's vengeance saved her from positive ill usage. It was altogether a wretched, unfortunate affair; and the intelligence—sad in itself—which reached me about a twelvemonth after the marriage, that the young mother had died in childbirth of her first-born, a girl, appeared to me rather a matter of rejoicing than of sorrow or regret. The shock to poor Dutton was, I understood, overwhelming for a time, and fears were entertained for his intellect. He recovered, however, and took charge of his grandchild, the father very willingly resigning the onerous burden.

My brother-in-law left James Dutton's neighbourhood for a distant part of the country about this period, and I saw nothing of the bereaved father for about five years, save only at two business interviews. The business upon which I had seen him, was the alteration of his will, by which all he might die possessed of was bequeathed to his darling Annie. His health, I was glad to find, was quite restored; and although now fifty years of age, the bright light of his young days sparkled once more in his keen glance. His youth was, he said, renewed in little Annie. He could even bear to speak, though still with remorseful emotion, of his own lost child. 'No fear, Sharp,' he said,

‘that I make that terrible mistake again. Annie will fall in love, please God, with no unlettered, soulless booby! Her mind shall be elevated, beautiful, and pure, as her person—she is the image of her mother—promises to be charming and attractive: You must come and see her.’ I promised to do so; and he went his way. At one of these interviews—the first it must have been—I made a chance inquiry for his son-in-law, Hamblin. As the name passed my lips, a look of hate and rage flashed out of his burning eyes. I did not utter another word, nor did he; and we separated in silence.

It was evening, and I was returning in a gig from a rather long journey into the country, when I called, in redemption of my promise, upon James Dutton. Annie was really, I found, an engaging, pretty, blue-eyed, golden-haired child; and I was not so much surprised at her grandfather’s doting fondness—a fondness entirely reciprocated, it seemed, by the little girl. It struck me, albeit, that it was a perilous thing for a man of Dutton’s vehement, fiery nature to stake again, as he evidently had done, his all of life and happiness upon one frail existence. An illustration of my thought or fear occurred just after we had finished tea. A knock was heard at the outer-door, and presently a man’s voice, in quarrelling, drunken remonstrance with the servant who opened it. The same deadly scowl I had seen sweep over Dutton’s countenance upon the mention of Hamblin’s name, again gleamed darkly there; and finding, after a moment or two, that the intruder would not be denied, the master of the house gently removed Annie from his knee, and strode out of the room.

‘Follow grandpapa,’ whispered Mrs Rivers, a highly respectable widow of about forty years of age, whom Mr Dutton had engaged at a high salary to superintend Annie’s

education. The child went out, and Mrs Rivers, addressing me, said in a low voice: 'Her presence will prevent violence; but it is a sad affair.' She then informed me that Hamblin, to whom Mr Dutton allowed a hundred a year, having become aware of the grandfather's extreme fondness for Annie, systematically worked that knowledge for his own sordid ends, and preluded every fresh attack upon Mr Dutton's purse by a threat to reclaim the child. 'It is not the money,' remarked Mrs Rivers in conclusion, 'that Mr Dutton cares so much for, but the thought that he holds Annie by the sufferance of that wretched man, goads him at times almost to insanity.'

'Would not the fellow waive his claim for a settled increase of his annuity?'

'No; that has been offered to the extent of three hundred a year; but Hamblin refuses, partly from the pleasure of keeping such a man as Mr Dutton in his power, partly because he knows that the last shilling would be parted with rather than the child. It is a very unfortunate business, and I often fear will terminate badly.' The loud but indistinct wrangling without ceased after awhile, and I heard a key turn stiffly in a lock. 'The usual conclusion of these scenes,' said Mrs Rivers. 'Another draft upon his strong-box will purchase Mr Dutton a respite as long as the money lasts.' I could hardly look at James Dutton when he re-entered the room. There was that in his countenance which I do not like to read in the faces of my friends. He was silent for several minutes; at last he said quickly, sternly: 'Is there no instrument, Mr Sharp, in all the enginery of law, that can defeat a worthless villain's legal claim to his child?'

'None; except, perhaps, a commission of lunacy, or'——

'Tush! tush!' interrupted Dutton; 'the fellow has no

wits to lose. That being so—— But let us talk of something else.' We did so, but on his part very incoherently, and I soon bade him good-night.

This was December, and it was in February the following year that Dutton again called at our place of business. There was a strange, stern, iron meaning in his face. 'I am in a great hurry,' he said, 'and I have only called to say that I shall be glad if you will run over to the farm to-morrow on a matter of business. You have seen perhaps, in the paper, that my dwelling-house took fire the night before last. You have not? Well, it is upon that I would consult you. Will you come?' I agreed to do so, and he withdrew.

The fire had not, I found, done much injury. It had commenced in a kind of miscellaneous store-room; but the origin of the fire appeared to me, as it did to the police-officers that had been summoned, perfectly unaccountable. 'Had it not been discovered in time, and extinguished,' I observed to Mrs Rivers, 'you would all have been burned in your beds.'

'Why, no,' replied that lady, with some strangeness of manner. 'On the night of the fire, Annie and I slept at Mr Elsworthy's' (I have omitted to notice, that my brother-in-law and family had returned to their old residence), 'and Mr Dutton remained in London, whither he had gone to see the play.'

'But the servants might have perished?'

'No. A whim, apparently, has lately seized Mr Dutton, that no servant or labourer shall sleep under the same roof with himself; and those new outhouses, where their bedrooms are placed are, you see, completely detached, and are indeed, as regards this dwelling, made fire-proof.'

At this moment Mr Dutton appeared, and interrupted our conversation. He took me aside. 'Well,' he said,

‘to what conclusion have you come? The work of an incendiary, is it not? Somebody, too, that knows I am not insured’——

‘Not insured!’

‘No; not for this dwelling-house. I did not renew the policy some months ago.’

‘Then,’ I jestingly remarked, ‘you, at all events, are safe from any accusation of having set fire to your premises with the intent to defraud the insurers.’

‘To be sure—to be sure, I am,’ he rejoined with quick earnestness, as if taking my remark seriously. ‘That is quite certain. Some one, I am pretty sure it must be,’ he presently added, ‘that owes me a grudge—with whom I have quarrelled, eh?’

‘It may be so, certainly.’

‘It *must* be so. And what, Mr Sharp, is the highest penalty for the crime of incendiarism?’

‘By the recent change in the law, transportation only; unless, indeed, loss of human life occur in consequence of the felonious act; in which case, the English law construes the offence to be wilful murder, although the incendiary may not have intended the death or injury of any person.’

‘I see. But here there could have been no loss of life.’

‘There ^{he} might have been, had not you, Mrs Rivers, and Annie, chanced to sleep out of the house.’

‘True—true—a diabolic villain, no doubt. But we’ll ferret him out yet. You are a keen hand, Mr Sharp, and will assist, I know. Yes, yes—it’s some fellow that hates me—that I perhaps hate and loathe’—he added with a sudden gnashing fierceness, and striking his hand with furious violence on the table—‘as I do a spotted toad!’

I hardly recognised James Dutton in this fitful, dis-

jointed talk, and as there was really nothing to be done or to be inquired into, I soon went away.

‘Only one week’s interval,’ I hastily remarked to Mr Flint one morning after glancing at the newspaper, ‘and another fire at Dutton’s farm-house!’

‘The deuce! He is in the luck of it apparently,’ replied Flint, without looking up from his employment. My partner knew Dutton only by sight.

The following morning, I received a note from Mrs Rivers. She wished to see me immediately on a matter of great importance. I hastened to Mr Dutton’s, and found, on arriving there, that George Hamblin was in custody, and undergoing an examination, at no great distance off, before two county magistrates, on the charge of having fired Mr Dutton’s premises. The chief evidence was, that Hamblin had been seen lurking about the place just before the flames broke out, and that near the window where an incendiary might have entered there were found portions of several lucifer-matches, of a particular make, and corresponding to a number found in Hamblin’s bedroom. To this Hamblin replied, that he had come to the house by Mr Dutton’s invitation, but found nobody there. This, however, was vehemently denied by Mr Dutton. He had made no appointment with Hamblin to meet at his, Dutton’s house. How should he, purposing as he did to be in London at the time? With respect to the lucifer-matches, Hamblin said he had purchased them of a mendicant, and that Mr Dutton saw him do so. This also was denied. It was further proved, that Hamblin, when in drink, had often said he would ruin Dutton before he died. Finally, the magistrates, though with some hesitation, decided that there was hardly sufficient evidence to warrant them in committing the prisoner for trial, and he was discharged, much to the rage and indignation of the prosecutor.

Subsequently, Mrs Rivers and I had a long private conference. She and the child had again slept at Elsworthy's on the night of the fire, and Dutton in London. 'His excuse is,' said Mrs Rivers, 'that he cannot permit us to sleep here unprotected by his presence.' We both arrived at the same conclusion, and at last agreed upon what should be done, attempted rather, and that without delay.

Just before taking leave of Mr Dutton, who was in an exceedingly excited state, I said: 'By-the-bye, Dutton, you have promised to dine with me on some early day. Let it be next Tuesday. I shall have one or two bachelor friends, and we can give you a shake-down for the night.'

'Next Tuesday?' said he quickly. 'At what hour do you dine?'

'At six. Not a half-moment later.'

'Good! I will be with you.' We then shook hands, and parted.

The dinner would have been without interest to me, had not a note previously arrived from Mrs Rivers, stating that she and Annie were again to sleep that night at Elsworthy's. This promised results.

James Dutton, who rode into town, was punctual, and, as always of late, flurried, excited, nervous—not, in fact, it appeared to me precisely in his right mind. The dinner passed off as dinners usually do, and the after-proceedings went on very comfortably till about half-past nine o'clock, when Dutton's perturbation, increased perhaps by the considerable quantity of wine he had swallowed, not drunk, became, it was apparent to everybody, almost uncontrollable. He rose—purposeless it seemed—sat down again—drew out his watch almost every minute, and answered remarks addressed to him in the wildest manner. The decisive moment was, I saw, arrived, and at a gesture of mine, Elsworthy, who was in my confidence, addressed Dutton.

‘By the way, Dutton, about Mrs Rivers and Annie. I forgot to tell you of it before.’

The restless man was on his feet in an instant, and glaring with fiery eagerness at the speaker.

‘What! what!’ he cried with explosive quickness—‘what about Annie? Death and fury!—speak! will you?’

‘Don’t alarm yourself, my good fellow. It’s nothing of consequence. You brought Annie and her governess, about an hour before I started, to sleep at our house’—

‘Yes—yes,’ gasped Dutton, white as death, and every fibre of his body shaking with terrible dread. Yes—well, well, go on. Thunder and lightning! out with it, will you?’

‘Unfortunately, two female cousins arrived soon after you went away, and I was obliged to escort Annie and Mrs Rivers home again.’ A wild shriek—yell is perhaps the more appropriate expression—burst from the conscience and fear-stricken man. Another instant, and he had torn his watch from the fob, glanced at it with dilated eyes, dashed it on the table, and was rushing madly towards the door, vainly withstood by Elsworthy, who feared we had gone too far.

‘Out of the way!’ screamed the madman. ‘Let go, or I’ll dash you to atoms!’ Suiting the action to the threat, he hurled my brother-in-law against the wall with stunning force, and rushed on, shouting incoherently: ‘My horse! There is time yet! Tom Edwards, my horse!’

Tom Edwards was luckily at hand, and although mightily surprised at the sudden uproar, which he attributed to Mr Dutton being in drink, mechanically assisted to saddle, bridle, and bring out the roan mare; and before I could reach the stables, Dutton’s foot was in the stirrup. I

shouted 'Stop' as loudly as I could, but the excited horseman did not heed, perhaps not hear me: and away he went, at a tremendous speed, hatless, and his long gray-tinted hair streaming in the wind. It was absolutely necessary to follow. I therefore directed Elsworth's horse, a much swifter and more peaceful animal than Dutton's, to be brought out; and as soon as I got into the high country road, I too dashed along at a rate much too headlong to be altogether pleasant. The evening was clear and bright, and I now and then caught a distant sight of Dutton, who was going at a frantic pace across the country, and putting his horse at leaps that no man in his senses would have attempted. I kept the high-road, and we had thus ridden about half an hour perhaps, when a bright flame about a mile distant, as the crow flies, shot suddenly forth, strongly relieved against a mass of dark wood just beyond it. I knew it to be Dutton's house, even without the confirmation given by the frenzied shout which at the same moment arose on my left hand. It was from Dutton. His horse had been *staked*, in an effort to clear a high fence, and he was hurrying desperately along on foot. I tried to make him hear me, or to reach him, but found I could do neither: his own wild cries and imprecations drowned my voice, and there were impassable fences between the high-road and the fields across which he madly hasted.

The flames were swift this time, and defied the efforts of the servants and husbandmen who had come to the rescue, to stay, much less to quell them. Eagerly as I rode, Dutton arrived before the blazing pile at nearly the same moment as myself, and even as he fiercely struggled with two or three men, who strove by main force to prevent him from rushing into the flames, only to meet with certain death, the roof and floors of the

building fell in with a sudden crash. He believed that all was over with the child, and again hurling forth the wild despairing cry I had twice before heard that evening, he fell down, as if smitten by lightning, upon the hard frosty road.

It was many days ere the unhappy, sinful man recovered his senses, many weeks before he was restored to his accustomed health. Very cautiously had the intelligence been communicated to him, that Annie had not met the terrible fate, the image of which had incessantly pursued him through his fevered dreams. He was a deeply grateful, and, I believe, a penitent and altogether changed man. He purchased, through my agency, a valuable farm in a distant county, in order to be out of the way, not only of Hamblin, on whom he settled two hundred a year, but of others, myself included, who knew or suspected him of the foul intention he had conceived against his son-in-law, and which, but for Mrs Rivers, would, on the last occasion, have been in all probability successful, so cunningly had the evidence of circumstances been devised. 'I have been,' said James Dutton to me at the last interview I had with him, 'all my life an overweening self-confident fool. At Romford, I boasted to you that my children should ally themselves with the landed gentry of the country, and see the result! The future, please God, shall find me in my duty--mindful only of that, and content, whilst so acting, with whatever shall befall me or mine.'

Dutton continues to prosper in the world; Hamblin died several years ago of delirium tremens; and Annie, I hear, *will* in all probability marry into the squirearchy of the country. All this is not perhaps what is called poetical justice, but my experience has been with the actual, not the ideal world.



THE BANKRUPT'S SON.



It sometimes happens that the characters of individuals assume a decided form by the intervention of an unexpected incident, or the being placed in new and responsible situations. Few, indeed, whose lives have been marked by uncommon energy and determination, tending to the accomplishment of a definite purpose, but may trace the starting point—the crisis in their history—to some event which, by rousing their dormant faculties, or exciting some hitherto slumbering motive, has given a new turn to their habits, and a new colour to their lives.

George Belmont was in his nineteenth year when he received a summons to attend the sick-bed of his father, who, after maintaining a high reputation as a tradesman during the greater portion of his life, had failed in business, and whose constitution, already shaken by cares and disappointments, sunk under the combined evils of poverty and a keen sense of the degradation he believed attendant

upon his bankruptcy. George was his eldest child. He had received a liberal education, and been intended for a physician ; but his father's difficulties having deprived him of the means of completing his professional studies, he had obtained a situation in the counting-house of an extensive manufacturer in the town of Cottonville. Up to this period of his life George had manifested no extraordinary energy or ability, but was regarded by his employer as a steady well-disposed youth, possessing merely business talent sufficient to enable him to discharge his duties in a satisfactory manner.

Young Belmont, who was considerably disappointed in not being able to follow the profession he had chosen, and who imagined that he had a distaste for mercantile affairs, contented himself with the bare performance of his prescribed duty, indulging secretly the hope that something might yet turn up more congenial to his wishes. From this dream of the future he was, however, effectually aroused when standing by the bedside of his dying father—a sense of the responsibility attaching to him as eldest child, and only son of a widowed mother, came home to his understanding and to his heart. On George's arrival at home, he found that his father had been some hours speechless, though it was evident to his afflicted relations that he retained full possession of his faculties. With the anxious searching look so common to the dying, he gazed now on his wife, now on his little daughter, and then his eager eye sought the countenance of his son, who, struggling with emotion, made a vigorous effort to conduct himself with manly fortitude. Replying to the wistful and touching look fixed on him, George said : 'My dear father, I will, by the help of God, endeavour to supply your place to my mother and sister. I am young and strong. For your sake and theirs, I will devote myself to business, and

do not doubt but I shall be able to make them comfortable.' And as the youth uttered these words, in a voice tremulous with grief, he bowed his head, and tears fell thick and fast upon the almost rigid hand he held in his own.

But it now became evident that, though George had in part rightly interpreted his father's wishes, something yet remained unexpressed, which disturbed his last moments; for he made violent efforts to speak, and with much difficulty articulated: 'I wish to say more—something more.' George stooped to listen, but could only catch the words: 'Should it ever be in your power—my son, promise me'—— It was agonising to witness his ineffectual efforts to proceed; but just then the truth flashed across his son's mind, and he exclaimed with earnestness: 'I understand you, dear father; and I do most solemnly promise, that if it should be in my power, I will pay your creditors to the uttermost farthing; and may God prosper me as I fulfil this promise.'

A beam of joyful satisfaction illuminated the countenance of Mr Belmont. He grasped the hand of his son, and appeared to invoke a blessing upon him. The weight removed from the mind of the sufferer, he peacefully closed his eyes, and in a few hours George Belmont was fatherless.

This sad event proved an epoch in the life of the young man. The affecting scene he had witnessed, the solemn engagement he had entered into, together with his new and heavy responsibilities, combined to endow him with strength of purpose to apply vigorously to business. Though very young, he soon rendered himself useful and even necessary to his employer, who was glad to secure his services by such an increase of salary as, joined to a trifling annuity secured to the widow, enabled the family to live

in comfort and maintain a respectable appearance. Shortly after her husband's death, Mrs Belmont removed to Cottonville, where she not only had the advantage of her son's society, but was also enabled to place her daughter Emily at a good day school.

It is well known that success in any employment naturally begets a fondness for it; and thus it proved with George Belmont, whose activity and devotion to business increased with increasing years. Nor did his prosperity tempt him to swerve even in idea from his intention to pay the debts which so heavily weighed down the spirit of his poor father; but George had yet to learn that there may be opposing motives, which may render the performance of duty distasteful and difficult. This lesson he was taught by painful experience.

Amongst Emily's school-fellows there was one with whom she formed a close intimacy, and from whose society she derived both pleasure and advantage. Anna Burton was about three years older than Emily. Her father was a solicitor, and though not rich, he moved in society to which the Belmonts had not access. Childish intimacy ripened into friendship as the two girls approached womanhood. Through the interest of Mrs Burton, Emily, when in her eighteenth year, obtained a situation as daily governess, which furnished her with the means of independence, and enabled her still to enjoy the society of her mother and brother. The amiable qualities of Miss Burton, her beauty, talents, and above all, the attention she paid to Mrs Belmont and Emily, won the esteem and affection of George, and inspired him with fresh motives to exertion. Receiving as much encouragement as a timid and respectful lover can expect so long as his sentiments remain undeclared, George for a time indulged in blissful anticipations of future happiness, though without distinctly examining the foundation

on which they were placed. A cessation in the visits of Miss Burton first led him into a train of uneasy reflections on this subject, and compelled him to deal faithfully with his own heart, and to investigate his intentions. From his sister, George learned that there was no diminution in Miss Burton's regard for *her*. On the contrary, Emily declared that she found her increasingly kind and attentive, with this only difference, that she avoided all occasions of intercourse with her brother. It was evident, then, that she was influenced either by coquetry or the wishes of her friends. A little consideration convinced George that the latter was the true reason.

And now followed a struggle between duty and inclination—the most severe, perhaps, to which a young man similarly circumstanced can be exposed. From the period of his father's death, young Belmont had observed the most rigid economy, denying himself even the reasonable and proper indulgences suitable to his age, in order to lay by part of his earnings towards the accomplishment of that object which he looked upon as the most sacred and important of his life. Though this pious fund was not yet sufficient to enable him to redeem his pledge, he was master of a sum large enough to place him in a situation to ask the hand of his beloved Anna. Delay might endanger the happiness of his whole life. He could not bear that the woman he loved should labour under the imputation of indulging a preference for one who did not possess the sanction of her parents, or who was regarded by them as an inferior. Besides, it would only be delaying the payment of his father's debts; his intentions would remain the same—his exertions receive additional stimulus from Anna's approval and sympathy. With such arguments did George for a time endeavour to persuade himself that he might, without injustice, defer the execution of his long-cherished

project; but, finally, a sense of right triumphed, and his renewed determination to redeem his pledge imparted to his agitated and troubled spirit a degree of peace to which he had been for some time a stranger.

The affection which George Belmont bore his mother operated as a powerful motive to his perseverance in the path of duty. Her confidence in him was, he knew, unbounded. The hope that he would be the instrument of wiping away the only blot upon the memory of her beloved husband, had hitherto proved the cordial which had sustained and cheered her during the seclusion and privations of her widowhood, imparting to her declining years something of the hopefulness of youth, as she fondly pictured the time when, through the medium of the son, the honour of the father should be fully established, and her children receive the reward of their virtuous exertions and self-denial in the respect of the wise and good. To disappoint these cherished hopes, and betray the trust reposed in him, George felt to be impossible; and he regarded it as most fortunate that, just at this time, he was requested by his employer to undertake a journey to America. The mission about to be intrusted to him was important and confidential. The period of his stay was uncertain; but, on the other hand, the pecuniary advantages it held out were considerable; and it was even hinted that a partnership might prove the result of a satisfactory arrangement of the business.

When George communicated to his mother the offer he had received, she at once advised him to accept it, adding, that the loss of his society would be more than compensated for by her conviction that both his bodily and mental health would be benefited by the change. With cheerful alacrity did this judicious parent superintend the necessary preparations for his departure, wisely avoiding all unneces-

sary and sentimental regrets ; and whilst both mother and son refrained from explanations respecting the principal reason which reconciled them to the separation, they fully understood and appreciated the generosity and delicacy of each other.

We hope our readers will not condemn George if we confess that he actually sailed for New York without making a single effort to communicate with the object of his affections ; and Anna—but we forbear investigating minutely the state of the lady's feelings ; it will suffice to say, that, allowing for the due proportion of the self-inflicted torments to which lovers are liable, she believed that she discerned the true state of the case, and, strong in faith, she hoped for the best.

We will pass over the eighteen months spent by Mr Belmont in the United States, and introduce him again to our readers at the end of that time, greatly improved both in manner and circumstances. Extensive intercourse with the world, joined to the information he had gained in his travels, had done much to correct the too-retiring and almost bashful demeanour of the clerk, whose sedentary and retired habits had kept him ignorant of the forms of polished society. Having skilfully transacted the business on which he was sent, he had received as the reward of his exertions a small share in the lucrative concern to whose interest he had unremittingly devoted himself for the last ten years ; and though but a month had elapsed since his arrival in England, he had had ample time to prove the truth of the proverb—‘Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.’

‘A month ! Can it be only a month since my son's return home ?’ thought Mrs Belmont, as she sat awaiting the return of the young people from an evening party given by George's late employer, for the express purpose of intro-

ducing Mr Belmont to a select circle of his friends; 'and yet how many events seem crowded into that short space. My dear George a servant no longer, but a partner in the most extensive concern in Cottonville; his long hoarded and hardly-earned savings increased to an amount sufficient to enable him to call together the creditors of his father, and satisfy all their just demands; and my daughter—my modest, affectionate Emily—enabled, by his means, to mix on terms of equality with the society she is fitted to adorn. "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me," and my "mourning is turned into rejoicing." As these and similar reflections passed through the mind of the mother, her heart swelled with emotions of gratitude to Him who has styled himself the God of the fatherless and widow. She was aroused by carriage-wheels, and in a few minutes was joined by her children.

'O mamma!' exclaimed Emily, as she warmly embraced her, 'you should have been with us this evening to witness your son's triumph. I assure you Mr Belmont has created quite a sensation, and been the lion of the party.'

'Nay, you do injustice to the successful debut of Miss Belmont,' observed her brother gaily; 'what think you, mother, of our demure little governess setting up for a belle?'

'But, seriously,' pursued the young lady, 'it has been highly amusing to witness the polite attentions we have both received from persons who lately would have treated us as inferiors. Mr Burton, especially, was extremely cordial, and so pointed in his behaviour to George, that Anna was evidently distressed by it, and I thought her unusually reserved. If I am not mistaken, he gave you a pressing invitation to his house, Mr Belmont?'

'Yes,' replied George, 'I am happy to say he did. And now, mother, if you are not too tired and sleepy, I should

be glad to ask your advice on a subject of great importance to me.'

'I understand you, my dear son, and my advice is—marry. Hitherto your position and circumstances have prescribed silence as your wisest and most honourable course. Now your altered situation and excellent prospects leave you at liberty to urge your suit. I hope and believe you possess the esteem of our dear Anna. You have my cordial approbation and blessing.'

'Thank you; this is only what I expected from *you*, dear mother; but I feel far from sanguine as to my success. I think—that is, I hope—Anna and I understand each other; but, notwithstanding Mr Burton's apparent cordiality, I apprehend some difficulty respecting the disposal I am about to make of my ready money. You know I cannot marry without funds, and I fear he will neither make me any advance, nor sanction the necessary delay. In that case, what I am to do is the question.'

'Would it not be advisable to wait until you have met the creditors, and settled the business?' suggested Mrs Belmont.

'Dear mother, no. I cannot consent to keep Anna longer in suspense. I am no stoic, and my experience this night has convinced me that it would be unjust to her, to postpone my declaration. No, no; I will seal my fate to-morrow; and if Mr Burton raises objections, Anna will at all events know that I am not to blame.'

Having made this magnanimous resolve, George went to bed, but not to sleep. Excited by his recent interview with Miss Burton, whose unaffected delicacy and womanly reserve had charmed and touched him, and agitated by doubts and fears as to the result of his interview with her father, he lay ruminating upon his prospects; and

when at last he fell into an uneasy slumber, his dreams were but a continuation of his waking reveries.

With a beating heart did our hero knock at the door of Mr Burton's house on the following morning, and request a private audience of that gentleman. On being ushered into the library, George at once explained the object of his visit with the eloquence which true feeling never fails to inspire, urging his long-cherished affection, and touching slightly upon the pain and anxiety he had endured whilst following the course he deemed honourable with his sense of the relative positions of Miss Burton and himself. So far all seemed prosperous. Nothing could exceed the urbanity of Mr Burton, who warmly commended the line of conduct pursued by his young friend, and expressed himself much obliged by it; but when George proceeded to state briefly and simply the obligations which devolved upon him, previous to his settlement in life, he was listened to with constrained politeness. In vain did he pause in his relation for an expression of sympathy or look of approbation. A silent bow was the only token vouchsafed by his auditor. Embarrassed, he scarcely knew why, George found himself at the end of his story with a consciousness that he had utterly failed in making the impression he had desired. After a pause of a few moments, during which Mr Burton appeared waiting in expectation of some further communication, he said: 'You are not so young a man, Mr Belmont, nor so ignorant of the world, as to entertain any romantic notions respecting love in a cottage, I presume; I am therefore at a loss to understand your precise motive in honouring me with this explanation.' With increased confusion George replied that he had hoped for Mr Burton's advice (he had well nigh said assistance). He considered it his duty thus explicitly to state his

circumstances previous to making any attempt to ascertain the sentiments of Miss Burton towards himself, a point on which he felt naturally most solicitous; and his prospects being now good, he trusted a little delay would not prove a serious objection.

‘Certainly not,’ was Mr Burton’s reply; but since you have expressed a wish for my advice, you must allow me to say, that I think the intention you entertain relative to your father’s affairs, though it does great credit to your filial feelings, is rather singular, and the obligation more imaginary than real. It is well known that your father’s misfortunes were the result of untoward circumstances, and not of any misconduct on his part. He acted throughout in an upright manner, and no blame can possibly attach to his memory. It appears to me unnecessary that you should inconvenience yourself for the sake of doing what neither law nor equity requires of you.’

‘I will not attempt to argue the point with you, sir,’ George modestly answered; ‘but I must remind you that I am bound by a voluntary and solemn promise, given at a time when such engagements are deemed most sacred.’

‘Well, well,’ rejoined Mr Burton, ‘there is no need of hurry. Let me recommend you to take time to reconsider the matter. Do nothing in haste, my young friend. A few years cannot affect the spirit of the promise. Allow me to recall your words: I hope a little delay will not prove a serious objection.’ Here Mr Burton indulged in a patronising laugh; then rising, he added: ‘In the meantime, I shall be happy to introduce you to Miss Burton, with whom you can talk over this weighty affair. The influence of the ladies is, we know, most powerful; and should you decide to make use of the cash for a time, I shall raise no obstacle to your wishes, and regret that my affairs will not admit of my doing more at present.’

The mortification and disappointment George had experienced during this conversation were amply atoned for by the cordiality with which Anna sympathised in his views, and strengthened his purposes. Had her father commended his intentions, and offered to find him means of marrying without delay, he could not have had a lighter heart, or more buoyant spirits, than were the results of his explanation with the daughter, in whose affection and constancy he felt unbounded reliance. True, their union must be postponed, and that to an indefinite period ; but they should commence life free and unshackled, indebted to their mutual prudence and self-denial for that independence which they only can appreciate who have known the misery arising from a load of debt.

About a week after George's interview with Mr Burton, that gentleman, whilst seated at breakfast, glancing over the county newspaper, observed, to his no small surprise, an advertisement addressed to the creditors of the late Mr Belmont, appointing an early day for the examination and discharge of their respective claims. With a mixture of sarcasm and vexation, he commented upon what he styled the quixotic folly of the cool and unimpassioned lover he congratulated his daughter on possessing. To his remarks Anna listened in silence ; but the expression of her fine countenance, and her whole demeanour, evinced such perfect contentment, such calm and settled happiness, that the man of the world was abashed, as the conviction flashed across his mind that his child enjoyed a felicity superior in kind, and more lasting in duration, than ever could result from the realisation of the most brilliant schemes of a merely selfish nature. There are moments when the most worldly characters are compelled to believe in the existence of disinterested virtue ; and it is seldom such belief reaches the understanding through the medium

of the affections, without exercising a beneficial and softening influence. Certain it is, that from this time Mr Burton refrained from any allusions to George's folly ; and though he stood aloof from rendering active service to the lovers, he offered no obstacle to Mr Belmont's visits as his daughter's affianced husband.

A little more than a year elapsed after Mr Belmont's return from America, before he found himself able to offer a home to his beloved Anna. It would doubtless have required a much longer time, had not her wishes and views been moderate as his own. Who can describe his happiness as he sat by the clear bright fire on his own hearth, his wife by his side, fully alive to the sweet influences of home and domestic enjoyment, heightened by the consciousness that to his own persevering exertions he was indebted for his present position and prospects.

The young people had been married only a month, and had that day returned from their wedding tour. The friends assembled to welcome them were departed. The skill and good taste of Emily, who had during their absence arranged their little establishment, had been warmly commended by the bride, who was by no means insensible to the importance of being mistress of a house she could call her own. It was Saturday evening. The morrow must usher them into the little world of which henceforward they should form a part ; and there are few young couples, with affection as true and strong as theirs, but regret the termination of the marriage excursion. To mix in general society, give and receive the visits of mere acquaintances, and engage in the every-day business of life, appears, under such circumstances, no inconsiderable sacrifice. So thought our bride and bridegroom, who discussed their future plans, and indulged in past reminiscences on this evening with as much seriousness as if

they apprehended it was the last they should spend alone.

'And now, Anna,' inquired George, 'tell me candidly, do you not regret advising me to reject the offered loan of my partner, that we might have commenced life with a little more style?'

'No, indeed, I do not.'

'But, dearest, only consider the remarks your genteel acquaintances will make on the very plain and unpretending furniture, and the smallness of the house.'

'Fortunately I shall not hear their remarks,' returned she laughing; 'and if I did, I could assure them that I have more pleasure in knowing that what we possess is truly our own, than all the borrowed style in the world could afford me.'

'To say nothing of the pleasure your generous heart experiences in the sacrifice you made for my mother,' added her husband with tenderness.

'O George, let that subject never more be mentioned between us. You humble and mortify me by such allusions. I must indeed be selfish to hesitate between the comfort of our dear parent and a silver tea-service, which after all would have been rather out of place here.'

'Yet your father gave you money for that express purpose, and how can you account to him for its non-appearance?'

'Oh, as to that, I shall preserve a discreet silence. I hardly expect he will inquire into the history of my magnificent dowry.'

'If he should, I will provide you with an answer,' said George, rising and unlocking a small closet placed in a recess, and displaying to the astonished gaze of his bride a handsome collection of plate, consisting of tea and coffee equipage, salver, cake-basket, and candlestick.

'My dear George, how came you by these expensive articles?' she inquired.

Her husband placed a letter in her hand, and gently drawing her to the sofa, sat by her side as she read it. It was from the creditors of the late Mr Belmont, and was dated two months previous to the time of George's marriage. Its purport was to inform him that, wishful to offer him a testimonial of their esteem, they had made a selection of plate, which they trusted would prove acceptable in the interesting circumstances in which they understood him to be placed. To this announcement was subjoined a list of the articles. Various were the emotions of the young wife as she read. Feelings of gratified affection, however, predominated; and, finding no words to express them, a few unbidden tears fell on the letter as she quietly refolded it. Her fond husband kissed them away.

'You do not inquire why I kept this affair a secret,' he remarked.

'I suppose you wished to give me an agreeable surprise?' she replied.

'I did at first; but when your father presented you with money to purchase plate, and you insisted upon applying it to my mother's use, I loved you so dearly for your self-denial, that I almost feared to break the charm by telling you of our riches; so I put it off, that I might the longer admire my wife's superiority to the foibles of her sex.'

'Your wife thanks you; but you overrate my philosophy if you imagine that I shall not feel pride and pleasure in the possession of this delicate and well-timed present.'

'Then you will not think it out of place even in our small house, eh, Anna?'

'No, truly; I can think nothing out of place which serves to remind me that your noble and disinterested

conduct has gained the esteem and approbation you so well merit.'

'Rather, my dear wife, let this costly gift serve to inspire us with a thankful recollection of the past, that, in all our future struggles between inclination and duty, we may be enabled to exercise the self-control which at this moment so greatly augments our happiness.'

With such views and principles, it is almost needless to add that the Belmonts continued a prosperous and happy family. In the course of time Emily married, with the approbation of her mother and brother. In the house of her daughter Mrs Belmont found a comfortable home, and lived many years, surrounded by her children's children, fully realising the truth of the wise man's saying—'The just walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.'



INFALLIBLE JUDGMENTS.



WE had not been long settled in the pretty village of Sunbury, where to us the sunshine seemed brighter than elsewhere, and the spring blossoms more luxuriant, when our father signified that we might expect an immediate visit from Mr Arthur—a gentleman of whom we had frequently heard, but whom we had never seen. From this announcement having occasioned great excitement among us, spinsters of various ages which need not be particularly specified, it may be inferred that the said Mr Arthur was a young eligible ‘match,’ or at least not a positively old and obstinate bachelor. Nevertheless, Mr Arthur was old, was a bachelor vowed to celibacy, and moreover, had no fortune to bequeath on his decease, as he merely enjoyed a life-annuity—a fact he made universally public. Our father always spoke of Mr Arthur with the warmest attachment: they had been friends from boyhood; but we ‘girls’ ever heard his name with a certain degree of awe attached to it.

As the time appointed for his visit approached, we all became quite nervous and fidgety, much to our dear father's amusement; nor did he in the least spare our nerves, dilating on the accounts we had hitherto received of this formidable personage, until we almost came to regard him as something 'no quite canny.' Report said that Mr Arthur was so close an observer of character—having devoted his life to the study—that the most hidden things in human hearts were open to his penetration. *He* could pick the black sheep out of the flock, though dyed white for company hours!—*he* could bring forth the bruised dove which had its gentle head beneath its wing, and needed, but received no fostering care!—*he* could detect the 'falsetto' of a husband's 'my dear,' or a wife's submissive demeanour! Alack for the frailties of human kind, what a set of cowards he made us! But fortunately, while wielding such formidable power, Mr Arthur was said never to exert it unkindly: he was benevolence itself—feared by the bad, and loved by the good.

'And who are the good?' said our Eldest; for we each know our secret sins and infirmities, and we dare not call ourselves good, even when striving most to resist evil.'

'Ah, dearest Mary,' we exclaimed in chorus, 'you can have nothing to fear from Mr Arthur's mysterious reading: your heart is a pure unsullied page.' But sister Mary shook her head and sighed, and we privately expressed earnest wishes that Mr Arthur were in Australia or at the North Pole.

Great was our surprise, therefore, on first beholding the formidable old gentleman; and vast was our relief when, after a few days' domestication, we came to the conclusion that report had exaggerated in this case, as in many others, and that Mr Arthur was not to be feared after all. Our sister Mary, indeed, could not be got to speak; she only smiled,

and answered: 'We must ask Mr and Mrs Sedley here to dinner.'

But before saying a word about this couple, Mr Arthur must be more particularly introduced to notice. He was a small spare person, critically neat in his attire; but with an absolutely silly expression of countenance. This was partly owing to his always having his mouth open—gaping about as it were—with constantly downcast eyes—eyes of the lightest blue when visible—inexpressive and quiet. He always wore his hat on the very back of his head—we often wondered how it kept on at all—his white hairs streaming down to his shoulders. He spoke little, was a great walker, chess-player, and reader of the newspapers, and made himself as much at home as if we had all been brought up together.

We detected no covert watchfulness, no stealthy observations, and our suspicions were lulled. Once, indeed, we experienced an alarm: our father and his friend were apparently deeply engrossed with a long-contested game of chess, and two of us girls differing about some trifle, a hasty word was spoken. Our voices were raised but a semitone; but we saw Mr Arthur regarding us from out the corners of his meek blue eyes—furtively, with downcast lids, but still regarding us. We looked at each other, and made our escape from the room as quickly as possible. 'Then *it is* true after all, and *he is reading* us!' we exclaimed; but the alarm passed away, and we began to think we must have been mistaken—Mr Arthur was so absent, so devoid of interest in everything going forward around him; while our sister Mary, pursuing the even tenor of her way, unruffled, and in the performance of daily duties, merely said with a pleasant smile: 'Let us ask the Sedleys to dinner.' Now we all perfectly understood what our Eldest meant by asking the Sedleys to

dinner, and the inference to draw from it, which was this—that Mr Arthur was a mysterious reader of human kind, and that the Sedleys, whose characters were a puzzle to us, were to be read by him.

They resided about a mile from the village in a desolate, dilapidated sort of half-farmhouse called Elder-trees, from the vicinage of many of these trees, surrounding a large dark pool of water, where Mr Sedley bred tench. Mr Sedley was an athletic, finely-formed man of fifty or thereabouts; an amateur farmer and enthusiastic sportsman: he was considered an extremely handsome personage by those who admired a florid complexion, Roman nose, and curling jet hair. These personal attractions were united to a jovial hearty manner, which, if not refined, was not absolutely ungentlemanly: he was a great talker on all topics, and liked to be thought a clever man; our Eldest had found out this weak point. She had also hinted at other failings, but we turned a deaf ear to aught that disparaged our favourite. Mrs Sedley was less than half her husband's age, though she had been married many years; she was a pale, young creature, and usually pronounced plain, but with fine eyes. Her manners were nervously timid and cold; she spoke little, and seemed averse to society: matrons shook their sagacious heads, and whispered that they pitied poor Mr Sedley—he had much to endure from his wife's habitual ill-health and peevishness; he spoiled her, indulged her fancies, coaxed and coddled her into fancying herself an invalid! Witness how often, when they were invited out together, Mr Sedley made his appearance alone—pleading headache, or some other convenient ailment, as an excuse for Josephine's absence; and often when Mrs Sedley kept her engagement, swollen eyes, as if from weeping, and manners marked by melancholy, rendered her society more of a bore than a

pleasure. Mr Sedley on these occasions evinced great concern and tenderness towards Mrs Sedley ; while she—sulky thing ! said the ladies—gave no answering sign in return for all this obvious demonstration of affection. Our Eldest was wont to say that she disliked Mr Sedley's eyes—she mistrusted their glance—‘for the tongue may deceive,’ said Mary, ‘but rarely the eye.’ We who had been accustomed to see Mrs Sedley only in her quiescent state, were not a little surprised at the change we witnessed one evening when she came to us during the unavoidable absence of her husband on some business matters. Her hilarious laugh, beautiful eyes lit up by animation, and her heightened colour, made us doubt her identity : this gay, pretty creature, the moping, sickly Mrs Sedley ? And when, on departing, she gracefully thanked us for a ‘happy evening ;’ there was a tremor and sadness in her voice which seemed to say, ‘happy hours are rare with me.’ Nevertheless we girls continued to lean towards the side of the strong ; and though our sister Mary pronounced Mrs Sedley ‘no ordinary being,’ we failed to discover any attractions in her silence, pale, jaded looks, and unsocial habits ; so we perfectly understood Mary's placid smile when she said : ‘We will invite them to dinner, and introduce them to Mr Arthur.’

For once in a way, they both came. Mrs Sedley was looking her best, but not as we had seen her on ‘the happy evening ;’ she sat next Mr Arthur, and contrary to his habit, the old gentleman paid much attention to his timid neighbour, and drew her into conversation. She often glanced uneasily towards her husband ; but he, after once or twice regarding Mr Arthur, seemed satisfied with the result of his scrutiny, and gave himself no further concern about his wife, but betook himself to an adjoining apartment where there was a ‘rubber’ in preparation. We

heard Mrs Sedley's low gentle laugh ; we heard her sweet voice ; and Mary, by a warning look, cautioned us not to disturb the couple, so pleasantly engaged, and apparently so well pleased with each other. Mr Arthur's face no longer portrayed vacancy ; he was earnest, interested, and spiritual, as he gazed upwards with those deeply-set eyes, and put back his flowing silver locks from his high forehead.

Mr Arthur had many opportunities after this of *reading* the Sedleys, and we believed he had succeeded in doing so most thoroughly ; but whatever was the result of his observations, with his usual prudence, they remained undivulged. We had suspicions, indeed, that he had dropped hints to our sister Mary, for she often looked sadly at Mrs Sedley, the tears coming into her eyes, while her manner towards Mr Sedley was more distant than formerly. Much we marvelled that Mary attempted no intimacy with Mrs Sedley, seldom went to Elder-trees ; but whenever she met that lady, which was indeed but rarely, we remarked a loving cordiality in her mode of address which few persons elicited.

Time rolled on ; changes came with time, and when some of us married, and left the village of Sunbury, we forgot all about Mr Arthur, the Sedleys, and village gossip in general. I had been abroad with my husband for many years, and the first Christmas after our return to England was passed at the old-fashioned hospitable mansion presided over by my husband's mother. She was an octogenarian, but a lively, charming old lady. There were other guests expected, and amongst the rest, we were told a Colonel and Mrs Devereux, of whom my mother-in-law spoke in raptures. 'They were so gifted, so gay and delightful, so fond of each other ; the bloom of their love quite refreshing to witness—their story was so romantic too.' Thus the lively

ancient ran on, exciting our curiosity to the utmost, but refusing to gratify it until we had become acquainted with the 'charming pair.'

Could it be possible?—did not my eyes deceive me? or did I, indeed, behold in Mrs Colonel Devereux the cidevant Mrs Sedley of Elder-trees?—Mrs Sedley as I had seen her on the 'happy evening' in our cheerful home at Sunbury, far more radiant and beautiful than then; as young in appearance too, for happiness is an unfailing renovator. She recognised me instantly, her colour changed, and her voice faltered; but as she turned towards her husband, whispering a few words in his ear, I *read* by the glance that passed between them a history of perfect sympathy and wedded happiness. We spoke of Mr Arthur; he had not been long dead; and I learnt that he had been Colonel Devereux's guardian and dearest friend. When I heard the singular episodes of Josephine's past life, I ceased to wonder at the almost mysterious veneration she cherished towards his memory. It gladdened the heart of our Eldest when the following particulars were duly transmitted to her, for the best of us like to find we have not erred in our judgments:

Mr Sedley met with an accident shortly after we left Sunbury, which brought on a lingering complaint, ultimately causing his death. During his illness, Mrs Sedley was an unremitting and devoted nurse, never quitting her husband's sick couch till death released the sufferer. His death brought also a release from suffering to her; for it is more than probable had she not been blest with an excellent constitution, the *one drop of water* which had for years been falling on her head, would have penetrated the brain, and wrought ruin to the delicate fabric of humanity. Mr Sedley left the whole of his property, about four hundred pounds a year, to his

wife; but hampered with the proviso, that in the event of her contracting a second marriage, she was to forfeit all claim to it, unless the aspirant to her hand possessed an income to the same amount, subject to no contingencies or casualties. He also placed a small casket in Mrs Sedley's hands, exacting from her a solemn promise that in the event of her accepting an offer of marriage after his decease, she would deliver it into the custody of her intended husband, charging him to examine the contents immediately, and to receive them as a legacy bequeathed by the dead.

Mrs Sedley gave the required promise, and accepted the trust: her sensitive, tender heart shrank from refusing a dying man's last request; but there was a look in his eyes when the vow was spoken which made her heart sink within her. What could that casket contain? Ah, it will never be opened! thought she, for I have had enough of matrimony.

Her first marriage had been to please her parents: within three years after Mr Sedley's decease she met Captain Devereux, and now thought of marrying to please herself. His income, hereditary landed property, was nearly double hers: he loved and wooed her; nor when she had whispered the final 'yes' was the remembrance of the casket forgotten. She loosened the key from a chain which hung around her neck, and gave it to Captain Devereux as he quitted her side with a curiosity to penetrate the secret almost equal to her own. He found nothing within save a letter, and it contained but few words; the purport of which was to rescue a brother man from irremediable misery, in a solemn warning to abstain from wedding Josephine Sedley, whose specious arts would be all exerted to appear in a fair light: 'but beware of her; turn away and flee ere it be too late, and your doom sealed for life.' Thus it concluded.

The handwriting was that of Mr Sedley, and it bore his well-known signature.

Incredible as these particulars appear, yet they are facts, and Captain Devereux was excessively shocked and startled as he perused and reperused the extraordinary missive. Josephine had studiously avoided speaking of her first husband or her former life, and seemed fluttered and pained by any reference to that topic; her health was still variable, and she often betrayed an uneasy restlessness of manner, which might indeed be attributed to many causes. Captain Devereux did not hesitate on the course to pursue, but laid her deceased husband's letter before Mrs Sedley, watching her intently as she read it. Her countenance changed not, but tears coursed down her pale cheeks as she merely exclaimed: 'It is cruel thus to persecute me from the grave! but oh, Edward,' turning to Devereux, '*you* do not believe this?' Her eyes beamed with love and truthfulness, and his suspicions, if he had momentarily indulged any, were disowned at once; but Josephine's wounded heart had noted the transient shadow, intangible to all but her, and she sank down weeping bitterly, burying her face in her hands. No persuasions could induce her to divulge the particulars of her married life: 'A wife's lips,' she always replied, 'ought to be inviolably sealed during life, and death may not dissolve the spell.'

A sad change crept over the young widow from this time; her cheek became paler and paler, and like one quite weary and exhausted with the struggle of life. That fatal letter had cast a blight over her from the grave; and she at length summoned up resolution to tell Captain Devereux that their engagement must end: she had no power to disprove the cruel statement so fearfully made.

'Your whole future life, my Josephine, will disprove it,' he exclaimed. But her morbid sensitiveness would in all

probability have caused her to shrink from ever becoming his wife, had not Mr Arthur providentially made his appearance at this juncture, and set all things to rights. The worthy old gentleman had been absent on a foreign tour, and great was his delight when he found that his young friend's future bride was *the* Mrs Sedley in whom he had been so deeply interested when at Sunbury. He heard the story of the casket from Captain Devereux, and Josephine's refusal to exculpate herself by casting blame on the departed ; and Mr Arthur's blue eyes sparkled as he rubbed his hands exultingly, saying: 'Right again, my boy—right again. I am *never* wrong in my judgments—never shall be. She is a noble creature, though perhaps a *little* too over-refined and fastidious, if that be possible. I *read* both her and her deceased tyrant—yes, you may start, for tyrant he was, and of the kind that breaks a woman's heart in the dreariest manner—under a show of kindness ! Talents, hopes, health, all buried beneath his overwhelming selfishness and egotism, for I made myself acquainted with their private history.'

'But did Mr Sedley positively ill-use his wife—surely he would not have dared to do that?' questioned Captain Devereux with flashing eyes.

'Well, he didn't beat her certainly ; but he was *jealous*—jealous as a man, jealous as an inferior—for he knew her superiority of mind to his own, and he quailed beneath it, and crushed her down. He was old enough to be her father, and he married her as a child ; but the child became a woman, and his jealous love might almost have been termed hate ; for it was not only those of his own sex on whom he looked with suspicion when they approached his wife, but women shared the same fate, and he grudged her a female friend. They had no children, and poor Josephine endeavoured to supply the void by dumb pets, on whom she lavished

perhaps too much attention. Mr Sedley destroyed these more than once : the very books she read he disliked ; and he was never satisfied unless she was darning his stockings, mending or making, or assisting in culinary preparations for his gratification ! Women, he said, were fit for nothing else. He hated fine ladies ; and he ought by rights to have married his cook. He had no pride in her beauty or talents. He was a handsome man, wished to be thought a clever one ; and so he domineered over his wife, who had not spirit or power to resist his violence, In my opinion, Sedley ought to have been placed in a lunatic asylum ; and if he had not been taken off as he was, I have no doubt he would soon have killed Josephine. Few women could have endured ten years of jealous madness as she did, so heroically and silently withal. *I'll* be answerable for her future conduct, Devereux,' continued Mr Arthur smiling ; 'and now fix the day for the wedding ; and tell her all I have told you.'

Mr Arthur lived long enough to rejoice that he had been made the instrument of saving one, so gentle and good as Josephine, from despair.

'Ah,' said our Eldest when she heard the tale, 'I am so glad I thought of asking the Sedleys to dinner.'

THE END.

